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AN
ONLY SISTER

By
MADAME GUIZOT DE WITT

EDITED BY
THE AUTHOR OF
JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN'



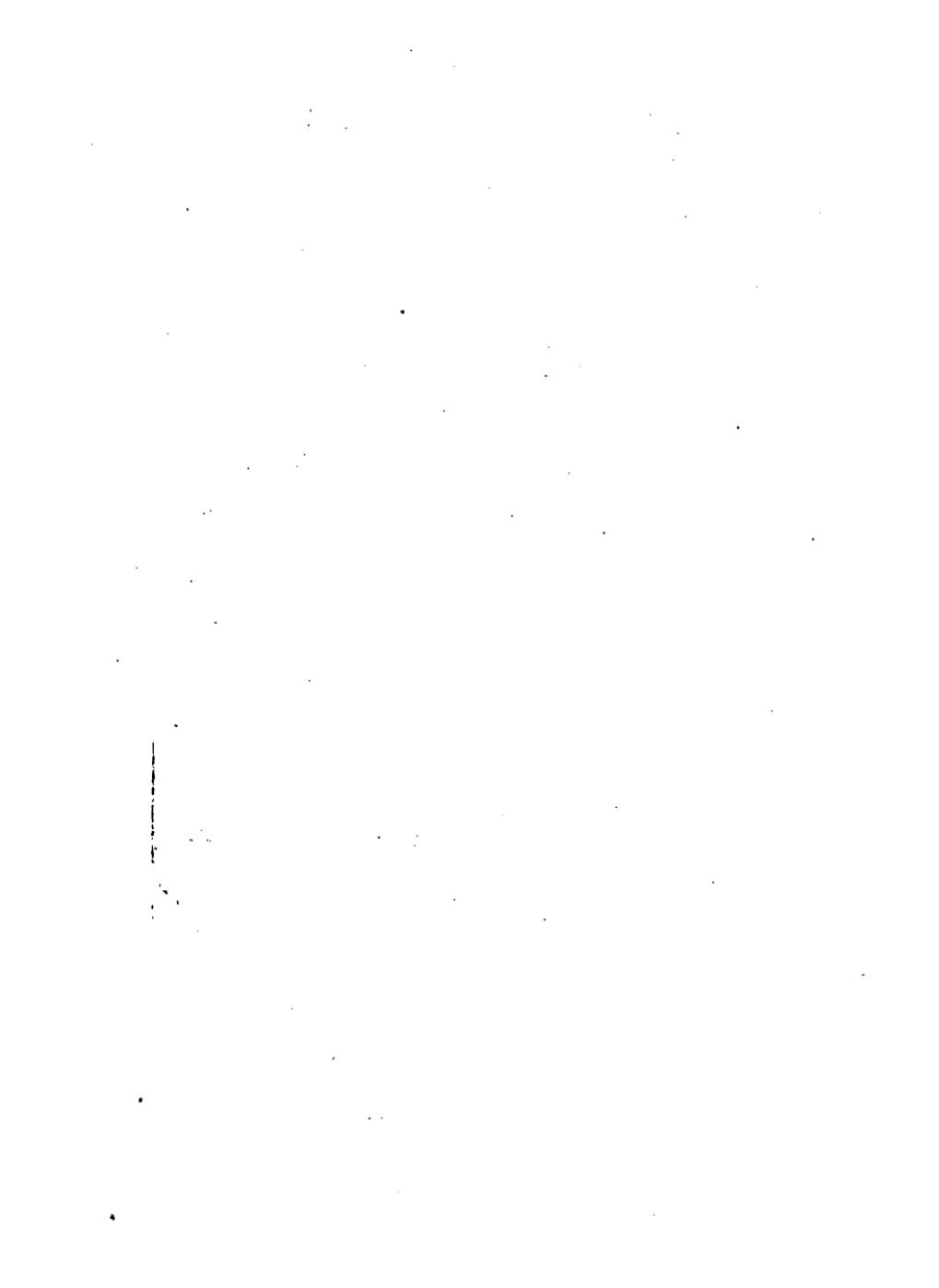


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THE WEDDING PRESENT

AN ONLY SISTER

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MADAME GUIZOT DE WICI



LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW & SEARLE
CROWN BUILDING, 268 Fleet Street

1870

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THE WEDDING PRESENT

AN ONLY SISTER

LV

MADAME GUIZOT DE WITI



LONDON

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111, NEW BOND STREET

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AN ONLY SISTER

BY

MADAME GUIZOT DE WITT



LONDON
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CROWN BUILDINGS, 188 FLEET STREET

1873

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P R E F A C E.



F this story, written expressly for my Series, and not to appear in its original French for some time to come, I have almost nothing to say ; it speaks for itself. In it the author paints real French life, and the real French woman—in her best and noblest type ; highly cultivated, but none the less domestic ; clever alike with her head and her hands ; keenly alive to all family ties and duties ; energetic, conscientious, self-denying, brave. Such may still be found in every nook and corner of that sad, suffering, and not alas ! sinless land ; worthy descendants of the old Huguenot dames —aye, and Catholic too—who once helped to make France glorious. In these her dark days, when dynasty after dynasty has crumbled away ; when her ‘lily’ lies

broken, her ‘bees’ are dumb, her ‘eagle’ has changed into the commonest of birds—it is pleasant to put forward as a true picture of the women—the best women—of France, Madame de Witt’s *Elizabeth*.

CONTENTS.

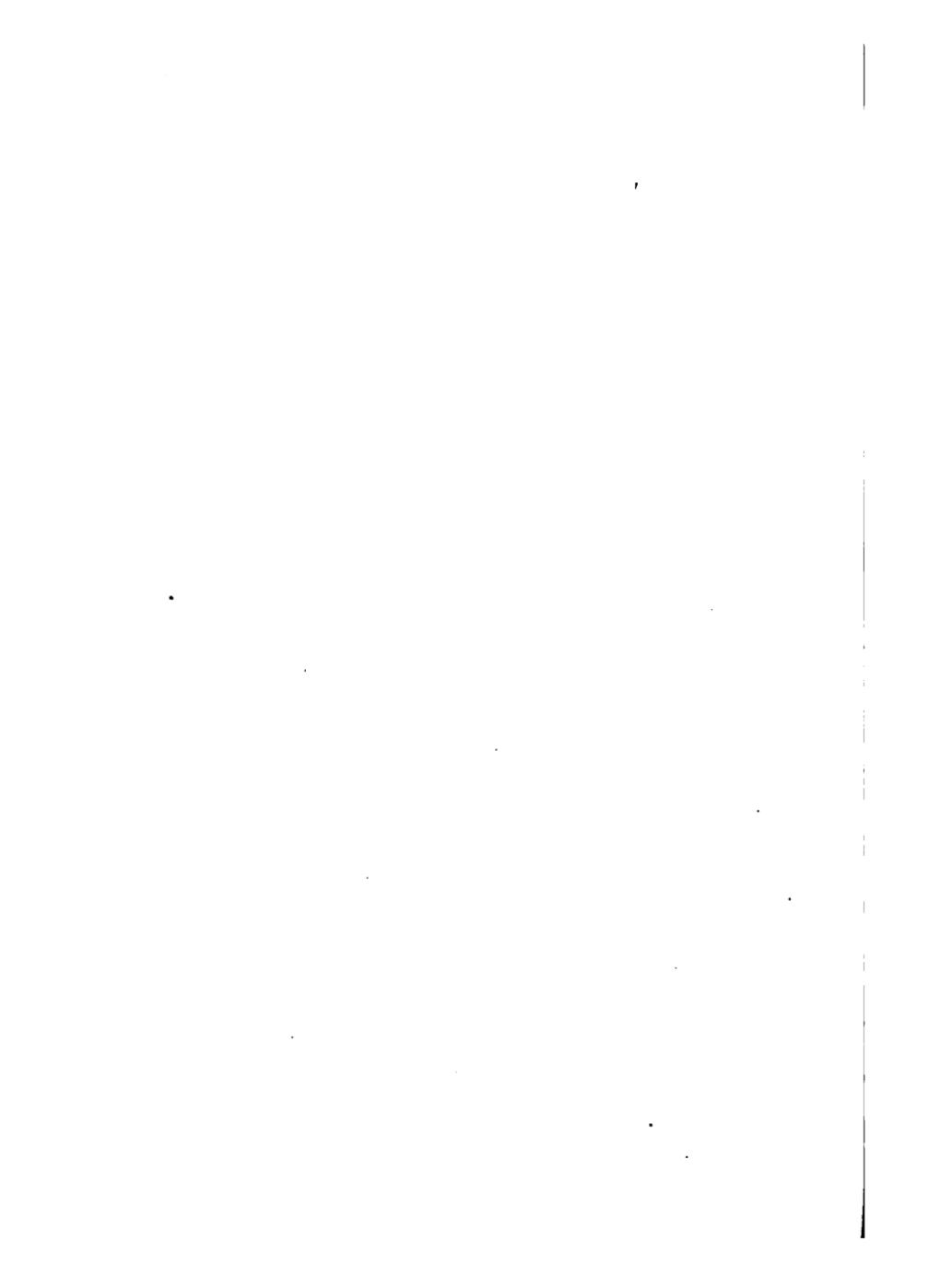
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. RESERVE AND RELIANCE	1
II. MOTHERLESS CHILDREN	8
III. LA TREILLE	16
IV. THE DISCOVERY	26
V. DELIGHT	33
VI. THE ACCIDENT	40
VII. REPENTANCE	45
VIII. CONVALESCENCE	51
IX. THE CATASTROPHE	61
X. REVELATIONS	67
XI. CHANGES	74
XII. LIGHT	82
XIII. NEW LIFE	90
XIV. CALM	100
XV. THE FIRST CLOUDS	110
XVI. IMPOTENCE	118
XVII. A VISITOR	125

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. A FRIEND	134
XIX. THE CHECK	145
XX. THE TRAVELLER	153
XXI. HARD TIMES	161
XXII. HELP	177
XXIII. A QUESTION	186
XXIV. STRUGGLE AND VICTORY	196
XXV. THE FINISHED WORK	211
XXVI. THE WEDDING	222

ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE INVALID AND HER DAUGHTER	<i>To face page 2</i>
HENRI'S ACCIDENT	42
DEATH OF MONSIEUR DE BAUVILLE	66
BLUNDERING MARC	109
THE CHECK	149
THE WEDDING PRESENT	230



AN ONLY SISTER.

CHAPTER I.

RESERVE AND RELIANCE.



2

SALON in a large *appartement* in the Faubourg St. Germain was brilliantly illuminated, but one end was carefully shut off by a screen from the rest of the room, and here only a faint half-light reached, and fell on a sofa, upon which a pale and delicate woman was lying. The greater part of the richly and beautifully furnished room showed no sign of family occupation: not a work-basket was to be seen; not a book, not even a newspaper lay about: but behind the screen a different state of things was perceptible; here there was a piano, an *étagère* loaded with elegant trifles, a delicious perfume of flowers. The room outside the screen was public ground; the part behind it was sacred to the invalid,

the lady of the house, whose tastes and occupations gave its special character to this little *sanctum*. She was alone, her head resting on her hand as if in deep thought, from which she roused herself, and with difficulty rang her bell.

‘Where is Mademoiselle Elizabeth?’ she asked of the servant who appeared. ‘Tell her I wish to speak to her.’ And the lady again fell into deep thought.

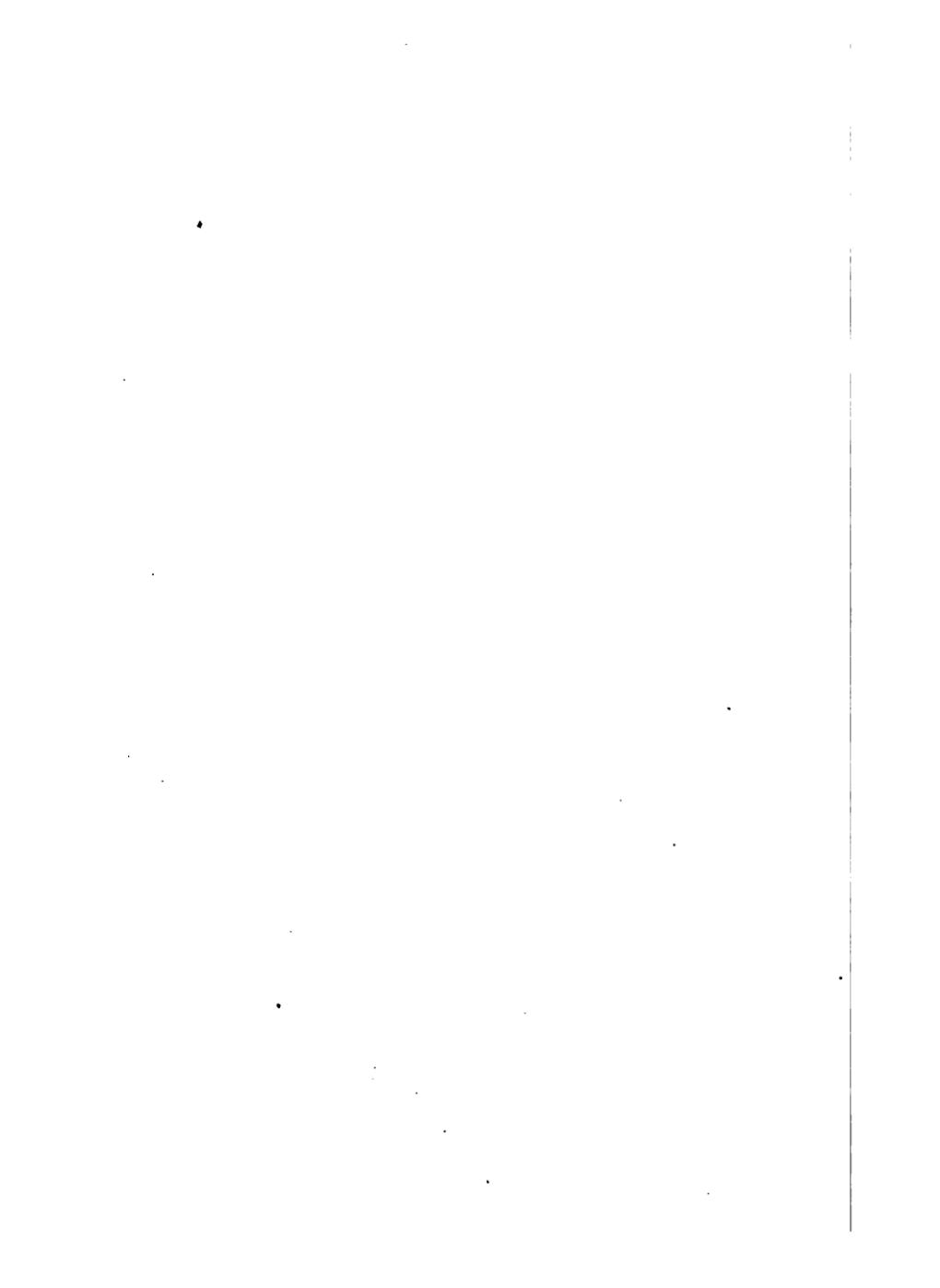
In a few minutes the door was opened, softly but quickly, and a large, healthy-looking girl, about twenty years of age, came and seated herself at the foot of her mother’s sofa.

Elizabeth had black hair; her eyes were blue, and perhaps in general a little cold, but when she was under the influence of feeling they flashed fire, and her whole face became full of light and passion. She was composed now, while she silently caressed her mother’s hands, mechanically playing with the rings on the poor thin fingers. She did not ask why she had been sent for; and her mother, satisfied by her presence, was also silent. After a while, however, Elizabeth looked up. A ray of light had come through a chink in the screen, and fallen on the face of the invalid, showing but too well how pale and worn a face it was. The young girl rose to remove the lamp lest its brightness should

[To face p. 2



THE INVALID AND HER DAUGHTER



distress the sufferer's eyes ; then, returning, she reseated herself, her heart trembling with an instinctive fear.

'Are you in more pain to-night, mamma ?' said she, leaning over the sofa. Her voice did not falter, but the mother's ear detected in it a more tender accent than usual. She opened her eyes, which she had closed when her daughter went to the other side of the screen.

'It will soon be over,' she said, gently, as if speaking to herself.

Elizabeth turned pale, and putting her fingers on her mother's wrist counted the feeble and unequal pulsations. Life seemed passing away drop by drop. The disorder which had for so long undermined the health of Madame de Bauville had almost accomplished its work. She had forbidden the doctor to inform her children of her condition, promising to tell them herself. He obeyed her, and eluded the questions of Elizabeth and her three brothers. He satisfied himself with going to Monsieur de Bauville's study, and informing that gentleman, who was working out a mathematical problem, of his wife's danger.

'But I doubt if he understood me ; perhaps he did not hear me !' said the doctor, as he hurried out of the room. And he was right.

Elizabeth, however, understood. Her mother's simple

words had removed the veil from her eyes. She knew now that this precious life was about to pass away from her before she could show her devotion, or lavish her care, before she could even make her mother know how dearly she loved her. But the young girl's emotion was undemonstrative ; she kissed the invalid's hands, which she had again taken between her own, and no tear moistened her cheek. Her face only became very tender while she watched her mother's slightest movement as if she would sound the bitter truth to the utmost, and yet at the same time enjoy to the full the last moments Death granted her before he came.

Madame de Bauville understood her daughter's distress, but she could not share it ; her time for emotion was past. Her mind had never been strong, and now both body and mind had reached a state of exhaustion which made violent feeling no longer possible. But she had resolved to speak to her daughter, and give her last advice to her while she yet possessed the power to do so. Maternal love triumphed alike over her natural reserve and her physical weakness.

'Elizabeth,' said she, softly, 'I leave you your brothers to love and take care of ; I confide your father also to your care : he will not miss me much.' Her voice became weaker ; but after a minute she continued slowly,

as if going back to the past, ‘I was too young; he frightened me. He is so learned, and he is always in his study. He never liked music; my piano always disturbed him. My poor father liked it so much. And so I grew fond of gaiety and amusement. I was pretty in those old days !’ and she smiled feebly. ‘I cared for dancing and that sort of thing ; if only he would have allowed me to go out with my mother! My poor mother! If she were here !’

Elizabeth listened in silence to these disjointed revelations, and for the first time she understood her father’s and mother’s life. She had grown up in this atmosphere of polished coldness, and had never asked herself if all families lived in the same way. Now, with her mother’s worn face before her, she blamed her father in her heart.

The dying woman continued : ‘When my children came I was no longer without an interest in life, but I was often ill; it is so long since I felt strong. When I tried to teach you you would not obey me, and your father, seeing you had learned nothing, sent the boys first to school, then to college. I kept my little Henri as long as possible beside me ; when he was gone you were the only one left, and Mademoiselle Derrien took care of you all day. You never had any taste for music,

and were always cross when you had to practise. I am sure if my little Henri had not been sent to college he would have been able to sing by this time. You do not know the meaning of music. The love of it makes one forget everything else and believe oneself to be already in heaven.'

Her eyes brightened at the recollection of the pure enjoyment she had derived from this much-loved art—the one art which seems destined for immortality. The life of this poor mother had been a sad one, and her hope of eternal life had brought little brightness into it ; yet when she thought of heaven she had always a vision of golden harps, and imagined she heard the voices of angels singing.

With a sigh she fell back upon her cushions, murmuring to her daughter, 'If only you could like these terrible mathematics ! But it is not a study for a woman. I could never work a problem.'

Elizabeth's eyes shone with unusual brightness. She leant towards her mother, and said in a low tone with a slight smile, 'I know how to do problems.' Then, encouraged by the questioning look in Madame de Bauville's face, she went on, 'I like mathematics, and I have studied them alone for two years.'

A thousand questions crowded into the mother's mind.

She reproached herself for the isolation in which she had left her husband, the apathy with which she had accepted the separation of their lives. She was astonished that so dry a subject could have charms for any woman—above all, for her daughter. Monsieur de Bauville's wrongs were forgotten : Elizabeth would make up for all.

'Since you have the same taste as your father, you will work with him, will you not?' she murmured feebly, without being able to explain her feelings, for she was confused and exhausted by the conversation. Elizabeth coloured hotly.

'My father would have a great contempt for my ignorance,' she answered, while an expression of proud determination lighted up her face. She would escape from her leading-strings ; she would triumph over all difficulties. Perhaps one day her father would not despise her efforts.

Madame de Bauville placed her hand on her daughter's neck, and said tenderly, 'May God preserve you, my child !'

But she could talk no more ; her strength was exhausted, and Elizabeth with difficulty supported her to her bed.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHERLESS CHILDREN.

MADAME DE BAUVILLE never left the bed on which, with such sad presents, her daughter had placed her. She grew so rapidly weaker that Elizabeth, as she watched beside her, saw her life ebbing away. Often while she slept would the young girl rise and touch her mother's cold hands and pale face to be sure that she still lived. At last—her daughter's arms around her, and with one feeble sigh, one slight shudder—her soul entered into eternity.

Elizabeth was accustomed to solitude, but in the anguish of the first hour of her grief those terrible words of Pascal, ‘I die alone,’ rose before her like a phantom. She longed to accompany her mother into the dark valley, and to go with her even to God’s feet.

‘She is alone ! she is alone !’ thought the girl ; ‘she no longer feels that I am with her.’

The poor child had not yet learned to know that God who pervades all solitudes, whose Spirit fills every empty space. But Madame de Bauville had enjoyed this supreme consolation, and her timid soul had reposed on her Saviour.

Elizabeth wept alone beside her mother's bed. Till the fatal moment Monsieur de Bauville had paid no attention to his wife's condition ; he had been long accustomed to see her ill, and yet from her sofa taking the quiet direction of the house. He was not surprised at her absence when dinner time came, perhaps he hardly even noticed it. Elizabeth sat opposite to him in the place in which he was accustomed to see the invalid ; and his daughter's silence was more agreeable to him than the chatter of his wife which his coldness had never had the effect of repressing. When living with her father and mother poor Marie Delahais had known that her slightest word was listened to with interest ; and after she became Madame de Bauville she continued to make her little observations and her insignificant reflections without perceiving that they were never replied to. Since his wife's illness Monsieur de Bauville had been accustomed, after a silent meal, to enter her room, and seat himself near the bed, without speaking, playing absently for a time with some object on

the table, and then to take his departure. Neither the startling warning of the doctor, nor the timid efforts of Elizabeth, had succeeded in turning his mind from the study of the science to which his life had been exclusively devoted. When his daughter, pale as death, opened the door of his study, and said in an agitated voice, ‘Papa, my mother is dead !’ the blow struck him without actually withdrawing his mind from its habitual pre-occupation.

He followed Elizabeth to his wife’s room, and looked for a minute on the inanimate body of the companion of his life, whom he had allowed to die without any farewell. Then he shut himself up in his study, and refused to join the family meal. ‘He will comfort himself with a difficult problem,’ said Elizabeth to herself bitterly.

She thought of her brothers whom she had sent for from college, though only when it was too late, for Monsieur de Bauville had refused to allow their studies to be interrupted.

‘They will see their mother on Saturday’ had been his reply to Elizabeth’s entreaties, for he shrank from his sons’ return, knowing that their noisy presence in the house disturbed his studies. But now when it was too late the three boys were coming. Marc, who was

sixteen, a gay, rash, versatile lad ; Pierre, who was fourteen, as pretty as a girl, but under his delicate appearance resolute and firm as a man, and entirely absorbed in his college prospects ; and Henri, a weak and gentle little fellow, the true son of his mother, a born musician, yet never having been able to study music, incapable of being happy away from home—even from such a home as his was—and enduring with difficulty the confinement of college life which his brothers really liked. ‘We can at least laugh and talk in school,’ said Marc and Pierre. And Henri also liked to laugh and talk with his schoolfellows ; but yet to sit by his mother’s side in silence made him far happier ; and often when these two were by themselves they would hold long conversations, and the child would pour out his infantine confidences to her. He had many a time been perfectly happy beside her couch in the half light. At such times he had not even wanted to hear her play ; and indeed for months Madame de Bauville had never opened her piano. His mother’s presence alone had been enough to make the boy content.

It was Henri’s arrival and his grief that Elizabeth dreaded above everything else, as she sat alone in her mother’s room. She tried to pray, and vaguely sought the God to whom her mother had gone. ‘She is happier

in heaven than here, I am sure,' she thought to herself, but yet she felt cruelly lonely.

'Who can I speak to now?' she asked herself sorrowfully, for even the strongest hearts sometimes need to tell their sufferings, and at this moment to the thought of her own isolation was added the bitter self-reproach of having with negligent indifference too often allowed her mother to feel as she was feeling now. She did not yet know that the mere presence of her children softens a mother's sorrows, and that a woman's most painful secrets have often been robbed of half their bitterness by being whispered into an infant's ear.

A carriage rolled into the great courtyard of the old house which Monsieur de Bauville had long ago chosen for his residence, far from the noise of streets and shops. Elizabeth hurried downstairs, for she wished to be the first to receive her brothers; but her haste was not needed, for no one else was thinking of the boys' return. Monsieur de Bauville had gone back to his study and resumed his work, only occasionally interrupting it to give a thought to his wife. 'Poor Marie!' he would say now and then, and sigh; but the subject of his sons' return never entered his mind. He had completely forgotten Elizabeth's request: 'Papa, may I send for my brothers?'

The lads entered the hall all together, and at the first glance Elizabeth saw in their faces that they were not prepared for the blow that had fallen on them. Marc looked grave and uneasy, but advanced decidedly, as if he was hurrying to see his mother. Henri had been crying, but like a child not accustomed to sorrow he had allowed himself to be comforted again. He kissed Elizabeth without speaking, and opened the door of the corridor which led to his mother's room. Pierre alone evidently understood ; he looked pale and anxious, and his eyes as they turned on his sister seemed to say, 'It is all over, is it not? We have no longer a mother?' After a moment, too, Elizabeth's face struck Marc with alarm. He stopped and said in a low tone, as if afraid to hear his own words, 'She is gone then!'

Henri opened the door without asking anything, and ran to his mother's room. Elizabeth had instinctively turned the key when she left it, and for the first time in his life the boy found himself arrested in his spring towards the arms that hitherto had always been open to him. He fell on his knees before the door and burst into tears : the terrible truth broke upon him. After a few moments Elizabeth with her two brothers joined him. A feeling of respectful sympathy had restrained them from following the poor child as he went to seek

his mother. But the elder sister uttered a sigh of relief on seeing him kneeling before the door and sobbing with all his heart.

With almost motherly tenderness she took the delicate boy in her arms, and with her other brothers following she entered the room where their mother lay for the first time insensible to their presence. Marc uttered a stifled cry, and kissed the cold hands that could no longer meet his. Henri hid his face in his sister's bosom. Pierre stood with his arms crossed, trembling like a leaf, and only by a great effort of his will maintained his self-command.

After a minute the four children instinctively fell on their knees and prayed as well as they knew how to pray, asking pity and support from God, whose sovereign power they saw asserted before them.

Monsieur de Bauville was informed of the arrival of his sons. The old housekeeper who had managed the house in the name of her mistress boldly entered his study.

'All the children are there, Monsieur,' said she, indicating with her finger the chamber of death. The father, obeying in silence the imperative gesture of the old woman, rose to join his sons. When he reached the room he stopped on the 'threshold, hearing

Elizabeth's voice saying, 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'

Monsieur de Bauville rarely thought of God or of heaven, but though he had limited the horizon of his thoughts to the calculations of science, yet he had not completely forgotten his mother's first lessons, and he bowed his head on his hands and listened with respect and even with some emotion to the children's appeal to their Heavenly Father. Some slight emotion was visible on his generally impassive face when, after the prayer was ended, he approached his sons, as they still knelt, and kissed them on the brow. Without speaking they all left the room together; but they had scarcely closed the door when Marc, turning to his father asked: 'Why were we not sent for sooner?' The accusing face of Pierre made the same enquiry. Henri still wept in Elizabeth's arms.

'I did not know—I did not believe'—murmured Monsieur de Bauville.

His sons made no reply. Marc soon forgot his resentment, and the childish breast of Henri retained no bitterness; but the gloomy wrath of Pierre sank into his heart, and he never forgave his father for having by this fatal indifference deprived him of his mother's last kiss and benediction.

CHAPTER III.

LA TREILLE.

Twas the day before the vacation began that the last duties were paid to Madame de Bauville.

The four children, dressed in their new mourning, were talking together in a corner of the drawing-room.

‘If it was not ridiculous to go back to college when everybody is leaving,’ said Marc, ‘I think I should prefer to return. In the study or the dormitory one would not notice as one does here that she is gone;’ and the lad gave a glance at the folded screen and the empty sofa.

Pierre listened in silence, not without a little contempt. He did not seek a forgetfulness which he felt was impossible; but fierce, hard work appeared like certain consolation in his grief, and so he shared Marc’s desire to go back to college.

Henri pressed his face convulsively on Elizabeth's bosom. Since she had taken him in her arms to carry him to his mother's death-bed, he would not leave her; he tacitly accepted his sister in the place of her whom he had lost; and the heart of the young girl swelled with a sweet yet sad sense of gratitude in feeling how readily the poor child confided his well-being to her.

She bent down to kiss him, saying to the others, 'Everything will be very sad without you at La Treille.' To him her eyes said what her lips did not add—'We will not separate yet.'

Monsieur de Bauville generally left Paris at the beginning of the vacation; not without regret, for the journey disturbed him in his work; but it was the habit of his household, and had been that of his father's before him. He was scarcely consulted about the removal, nor had his wife been used to take any part in it.

The custom was for Marianne, a week before the proper time for leaving town, to enter her master's study and say, 'When are we to go, sir?' And then she herself usually fixed the day.

They took few servants, for La Treille was only a simple farm that Monsieur de Bauville had inherited from his father. His fortune had come from his wife. But Marie Delahais had not brought her husband any

landed possessions, and La Treille remained the real patrimony of the children, who there enjoyed the two supreme benefits of a country life—liberty and repose. When the boys, tired with study, arrived at La Treille, they would go through the woods with an old gun on their shoulders, or pass long hours at the edge of the ponds fishing for carp : they were easily pleased and made happy.

Elizabeth recalled with pleasure the peaceful life her mother had led in this place, smiling and almost gay, arranging the large bouquets of wild flowers that Henri used to bring her. And the girl herself liked to be at La Treille. There it was not necessary to close the door of her room lest her father and her brothers should see her books and mathematical papers, for in the garret she had found a dusty nook lighted by a narrow window, and separated from the outer world by a pile of old packing-cases and rubbish. She had swept, dusted, and washed this place, and then had transported all her papers into it. Her garret was to her the great charm of her residence at La Treille.

Their sister's words recalled all their country pleasures to the boys.

‘We can work at La Treille,’ said Pierre.

Marc coloured, for he had thought to himself, ‘I will fish and hunt, and have nothing to do with books.’

Marianne had already commenced her preparations for departure.

'Now *she* is gone,' thought the old woman, 'the sooner we take the children away the better.'

La Treille was situated in Champagne, in a woody district of La Haute Marne. The country was not rich, and strangers did not think it beautiful. Elizabeth had not a keen sense of the beauty of nature, but she admired La Treille, because she was used to it and had loved it from her childhood. Could anything be more charming? she thought, looking at the old house as it rose black and gloomy at the end of a long avenue of fine elms. A more imposing dwelling had formerly occupied the site of the present humble manor house.

The gardener and his wife were in attendance at the door when they arrived. Madame de Bauville had made herself liked at La Treille, for no one had ever found her hard or arrogant, and in a quiet way she had done a great deal of good. 'She was kind to the poor,' they said in the village when they heard of her death. Modest praise, yet more valuable than many long epitaphs.

At the sight of the children in deep mourning Thomas and his wife felt their eyes fill with tears.

Monsieur de Bauville led the same sort of life at La Treille that he did in Paris. Once a day he took an hour's walk as he did in town, for health's sake, but he never looked at the fine green woods or the meadows where the cows grazed, or at the flowers growing by the road side, any more than he noticed the brilliant shops in Paris or anything that went on in the streets; only when he felt his feet getting damp from the wet grass he hurried in, for if he caught cold he knew he could not work. When the wood merchants, who brought the wood that had been cut down during the year, came to see him to arrange for purchase of it, he never received them in his study, in order that he might get rid of them the sooner. And he would scarcely listen to Thomas when he brought in his accounts.

'I have served the family for more than thirty years, and I would not rob him of a straw,' the old gardener would say; 'but though his fields did not yield him the value of a sou, he would never call me to account.'

As for the children, they were completely left to themselves. During the first week the reaction after their late distress, and the delightful freedom of their out-of-door life, sufficed to occupy them. Even Eliza-

beth's profound grief diminished a little. But, like Pierre, she was incapable of forgetting, and the germ of a great act of devotion had begun to spring in her heart. She had accepted the important duty which her mother on her death-bed had imposed on her. Even in pursuing her favourite study, in working in her garret in the early mornings, before Henri came to take her out for their walk, she thought of her brothers and of the help she might one day be able to give them.

Marc was destined for St. Cyr, and Pierre talked of the Polytechnique; but the eldest meanwhile could not work a common sum in arithmetic, and the second was entirely absorbed in his classical studies.

'Whenever I like I can soon know enough to pass an examination,' Pierre would say in his presumptuous ignorance. And he was not pleased when Elizabeth shook her head. He was not aware that for a year past his sister had carefully studied the programme of the Polytechnique school.

Elizabeth was not obliged, like Mademoiselle Sophie Germain,¹ to hide herself behind a cupboard-door to

¹ Sophie Germain was a remarkable French woman, born in 1776, who, in spite of the opposition of her parents and of many other difficulties, devoted herself from the early age of thirteen to the study of mathematics.

study mathematics, nor was she reduced to steal candle-ends to pursue her mysterious labours at night. But a natural instinct made her silent about them. Henri alone was in her confidence. No one but Henri knew the way to the little nook in the garret.

One morning when Henri came to his sister, according to custom, at eight o'clock, he found her with her head buried in her hands, her hair in disorder, and so deeply absorbed in a calculation that she did not hear the little boy's voice. He seated himself patiently upon a large book to wait. The sun rose high in the heavens; the morning dew which the child had hoped to find still on the grass and flowers gradually disappeared under the heat of the sun; the milk that had been poured early in the morning into the large brown pans had turned cold. Henri, who had not even had his usual cup of milk before breakfast, soon fell asleep, tired of waiting for his sister. At length Elizabeth uttered a deep sigh—a sigh of pleasure and triumph; she rapidly wrote a few lines, stretched out her arms with an air of relief, and then all at once saw Henri, his head resting on an old book, and his hands crossed under his cheek, fast asleep. With tears of self-reproach she bent down and kissed him. The child awoke with a start.

'Have you done at last?' he asked.

Elizabeth looked at her watch with consternation. It was ten o'clock, and she had not moved from her seat nor raised her eyes from her work since five.

'Have you really been waiting for me since eight o'clock?' she asked with vexation.

'I do not know,' replied the little fellow, rubbing his eyes.

'Come quickly; we shall have time to go round the little wood before breakfast.' And she led the way.

'But,' said Henri, mournfully, 'I have had nothing to eat this morning.'

Elizabeth coloured again; neither had she had anything to eat, but she thought nothing of that, and only reproached herself for having neglected her little Henri, and for having allowed Marc and Pierre to go to hunt without speaking a word to them.

'I will burn all these books and papers some day if they make me neglect the boys,' she thought, and she was quite capable of carrying out this desperate resolution. But God, who had endowed her with gifts rare among women, had destined her to accomplish a difficult task, and was silently preparing her for it. Our sacrifices, like our efforts, are made in the dark, and we need God to direct even our virtues.

Henri had been much struck by his sister's assiduity in her work. The contracted brow, the fixed attention, the unabated ardour of the young girl, made a deep impression on him. The child still retained certain privileges in his relations with his father which fell naturally to him as being not only the youngest child, but the one amongst them who was the gentlest and most caressing.

When Monsieur de Bauville left his study to pace the avenue with slow steps, without ever looking around him, Henri would sometimes come and put his soft hand within his father's, and walk beside him, though never venturing to say a word, unless a peasant in passing disturbed Monsieur de Bauville's reflections by his noisy salutation.

It was during one of these walks that the child communicated to his father the secret of Elizabeth's mathematical studies.

'She takes so much pains, papa; if you but knew—! When she is seated with her papers before her in her corner in the garret, she leans her forehead so heavily on her hand that one day I saw the mark of her rings over one eye. She does not move; she hears nothing; when I call her she often does not answer. Yesterday I was looking at her for a long time, and I ended by going to sleep. When I awoke she had finished, but

it was ten o'clock, and all she does is to make figures just as you do, papa. Is it not funny? But do not tell her that I have told you about it,' continued Henri, getting alarmed at his own indiscretion. 'She would be angry with me perhaps.'

A little curiosity was awakened in the mind of Monsieur de Bauville. He had long ago ascertained that Marc had no liking for close, abstract work, and that Pierre had a decided taste for literary studies, of which his father thought very little. Never before had the man of science conceived the hope of finding in anyone belonging to him that sympathy of taste and aptitude for research which he had not looked for even in his wife.

'Where do you say Elizabeth works?' he enquired of the child quickly.

'In the garret. She has made a little room like a tiny house behind the packing-cases. It is shut in by an old carpet. You can see nothing of it from the outside. She calls it her *sanctum*. I will take you to it if you like.'

Henri was determined to carry his treason to the utmost length.

'Let us go,' said his father,

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY.

LIZABETH had drawn conscientiously for an hour to satisfy her master, who never parted from her without earnestly recommending her to work. ‘You would do very well if you would take pains,’ he would say. But Elizabeth would shake her head ; she only applied herself to her drawing to gratify the old man, who had taught her from her infancy. It took time to win Elizabeth’s esteem or affection, but, once gained, it was gained for ever.

Her task accomplished, she had gone back to her retreat in the garret. It was not her ordinary hour for work ; her methodical mind led her to like regularity and fixed times for certain occupations ; she was accustomed to be engaged with Henri at that time, but she had not found him in the garden, and an unsolved problem tempted her to her *sanctum* with irresistible power.

She was deep in her calculations when Henri, half triumphant, half ashamed, having conducted his father across the dusty garret and between the packing-cases, put his hand on the cord that secured the old carpet—a primitive kind of fastening that Elizabeth rendered efficacious by intricate knots—and was proceeding to undo it, when suddenly the colour rose to his face. The cord was hanging loose and the carpet was moving, slightly stirred by the wind. The *sanctum* was occupied!

'Elizabeth is there!' said the boy, in a frightened tone.

'Well! are you afraid of her?' asked his father, and, not waiting for the repentant child's reply, he pushed the carpet aside, and entered his daughter's study.

Without casting a glance around him, or seeing the thick dust on the beams, or the spiders that were busy in the dark corners, or so much as looking at his daughter, who had raised her head and was staring at him in amazement, he advanced direct to the paper that Elizabeth held in her hand.

'The differential calculus!' exclaimed he. 'Is that where you are? You are wrong here—and here,' added he, after having rapidly run his eye over the page. 'This is what stops you;' and, seating himself on the

straw chair, he corrected the errors that seemed to offend his eye, with great animation. Then he rose and pushed the paper towards his daughter, saying sharply,—

‘Sit down there and finish it.’

Elizabeth obeyed without a word; bending over the figures, by a great effort she collected her disturbed thoughts, and resumed her interrupted work. Her father watched her, eagerly following her pen with his eyes; sometimes a gesture of impatience escaped him when the young girl made a mistake; then he grew calm as Elizabeth detected and corrected her error before going on. She had nearly completed her calculation, but something that was new to her came at the end of the work, and in it lay the knot of the whole difficulty. The father still watched her, but Elizabeth had forgotten him. He no longer disturbed her as he stood, cold and silent, with his eyes fixed on her as if he was weighing in his mind her faculties and acquirements.

She had not even perceived Henri, still agitated by the adventure, and divided between pride and conscious guilt.

After profound reflection, the girl took her pen and completed her calculation. When she raised her head

the perspiration had started on her forehead and her fingers were icy cold.

Monsieur de Bauville went up to her. ‘It is quite right,’ said he; ‘but you have reached your result through a tedious labyrinth, and there is a great high road to it.’

Then, taking his daughter’s place and beginning the calculation over afresh, he explained to his delighted pupil, step by step, the simple and certain methods by which such results are obtained. Elizabeth watched the operation with deep admiration.

‘I know nothing,’ she exclaimed, with a sigh.

‘You can learn,’ said Monsieur de Bauville, rising; ‘I will give you a lesson every day, since you can understand what is said to you;’ and he went away before his daughter had time to reply.

Elizabeth had fallen into her chair overcome by agitation and gratitude. How would it be possible to satisfy such a master? She had long entertained the utmost reverence for her father’s scientific attainments; but while she had a very genuine contempt for her own acquirements, she was proud as well as modest, and shrank from the raillery, the bitter remarks, and the supreme scorn that she had once seen visited on her brothers when they had been at La Treille, and their father had undertaken to make them work. The attempt

had ended by Marc scribbling on his paper in such a fashion that Monsieur de Bauville had thrown the book at his head, exclaiming—

‘ You are nothing but an ass, and all your life you will be an ass! Let me hear no more about you.’

This was precisely what the lazy boy had wanted, and Marc’s grammars, dictionaries, and exercise books were all gladly put away. Pierre took a different course ; he worked continually, but he disputed every expression, every text, every turn of phrase, without ever yielding an inch of ground, until his father, more disgusted by his perversity than even by Marc’s idleness, gave up the battle.

Elizabeth wondered if she should have to endure such humiliations in her new relations with her father. Perhaps it might have been better if he had remained ignorant of the sympathy in their tastes.

‘ No,’ said Elizabeth, and she spoke aloud, forgetting the presence of Henri, who was waiting to be pardoned. ‘ Mamma always regretted not being able to take an interest in the things he cared for. He and I will have something in common. We will do something together, and I will work.’

‘ You are not angry then, Elizabeth?’ murmured a timid little voice, and she perceived Henri coming from

a distant corner exclusively given up to spiders ; the child had disturbed them in their labours, and they had revenged themselves by covering him with their webs.

Elizabeth had not yet had time to enquire what feeling of curiosity had led her father to the garret, and how he had found out her retreat. Henri's presence and plaintive accents immediately revealed his treachery, but when she turned to reply to him, the strange appearance the little fellow presented made her burst into a fit of laughter. Poor Henri, always sensitive, ashamed of the disorder of his dress, and vexed at his sister's laughter, began to cry, and this made matters worse, for his tears left lines on his dusty face, and Elizabeth laughed more than ever. Her gaiety at length reassured the culprit, and, laughing and crying together, he approached her, saying timidly,—

‘ You are not angry ? ’

She kissed him, and began to pick out the spiders' webs from his disordered hair.

‘ What put it into papa’s head to come up here ? ’ asked she. ‘ Did he ask you where I was ? ’

Henri bent his head without replying. ‘ I thought, as it was papa— ’ murmured he at length.

‘ Papa is entitled to know all that concerns us,’ said

Elizabeth, gravely; ‘but if he did not question you, and you have betrayed a secret that was confided to you, I shall know henceforth how far I may trust you.’ And she left her *sanctum*, which was no longer a *sanctum* to her, without turning to look at the poor child, who remained overwhelmed by her displeasure.

Elizabeth had the faults of such a character as hers. She was frank even to rudeness, and upright even to stubbornness. But she had not yet learned from time and experience, the two great teachers of life, that it is possible to be gentle without being weak, and to be indulgent and yet wise.

CHAPTER V.

DELIGHT.

 LIZABETH wondered how she should dare to penetrate into her father's study, and at what hour the promised lesson would be the least inconvenient to him ; she even thought he might already have forgotten his promise.

But next morning, when breakfast, silent as usual, was over, Monsieur de Bauville looked at his watch and said, ‘It is now a quarter past eleven, Elizabeth ; you will come to me at twelve o'clock :’ and he went to his work.

Pierre and Marc looked at each other in astonishment, knowing nothing of what had occurred the day before, and being almost ignorant of their sister's studies.

Henri did not dare to speak, so abashed was he still by Elizabeth's reprimand.

She blushed, and, twisting the corner of her apron in her fingers, at length explained in a low voice :

'Papa is going to give me a lesson in mathematics.'

'Why? What has he got into his head now? Is he going to make a galley slave of you—to chain you to an oar in his own boat?' These questions rapidly succeeded each other. Marc, sitting astride on a chair, flourished his arm in a transport of gratitude as he exclaimed,—

'What a lucky thing that it is not me! This time I should certainly have been hanged or broken on the wheel instead of being put into the corner with a fool's cap on, as it was six years ago.'

Pierre looked gravely at his sister as he asked, 'What induced papa to think of this?'

'I do not exactly know,' stammered Elizabeth. 'He saw a calculation that I was doing; there were errors in it, and he thought I needed teaching.'

'But where did he find you doing this calculation?' persisted Pierre.

At this point of the investigation Henri came forward, and, after a nod of assent from his sister in reply to his own appealing look, explained:

'Elizabeth was at work in a little place she has arranged for herself up in the garret, and I took papa there.'

The child's voice trembled; he was rather ashamed of his confession.

‘Treachery! treachery! treachery!’ shouted Marc. ‘I was very sure you did not go to my father to get him to correct your sums.’

Pierre looked hard at his sister, as he said with the air of an examining master,—

‘It was not a sum in simple arithmetic?’

Elizabeth laughed as she replied, ‘Not exactly.’

It was—it was a differential calcu—papa said,’ exclaimed Henri, who, in his eagerness, found it impossible to get to the end of his words; ‘he said your work was right, only you took too much pains; no—not quite that—he said something about a labyrinth, but that was what he meant; then he sat down and showed Elizabeth what to do, and he told her he would give her lessons every day. I must say I feel like Marc, very glad that I am not in her place. I should be so frightened.’

Marc rose and saluted his sister profoundly.

‘The differential calculus! neither more nor less! Mademoiselle, I am your very obedient servant. When I am preparing for my examination, I shall humbly beg the favour of your help.’

Elizabeth coloured.

Pierre drew himself up, and silently resolved never to have recourse to a woman’s knowledge for help.

When twelve o'clock struck, Elizabeth was standing at the door of her father's study, trembling in every limb. It required all her self-command to walk with a decent appearance of firmness; she was quite pale when she approached the table. A chair and a sheet of paper had been placed for her beside Monsieur de Bauville's arm-chair. The girl took courage when she saw these preparations; her father had not forgotten her, then. This was a satisfaction to which Monsieur de Bauville had not accustomed his children.

The lesson began. The father made a strict examination of his daughter's acquirements. And then, without a word of praise or an expression of surprise at all she had learned without any help but her own strong will and remarkable intelligence, he began his able and lucid exposition. Elizabeth listened with ever-increasing gratification and delight. She had dreaded this first lesson, not on account of the work her father might exact, but from the fear of not understanding her master, and perhaps making him angry. She was quite happy now, following her teacher with perfect comprehension into the high regions of pure mathematics.

Seated beside her father, her two elbows on her knees, sometimes turning round to make some rapid calculation

that Monsieur de Bauville required, she did not lose a word or figure, and took note in her powerful memory of all her new knowledge.

'That memory of hers is a bag into which she puts all she learns ; it never had a hole in it, and nothing was ever lost out of it,' Marc had once said in accents of mingled envy and admiration.

The lesson lasted for two hours, and neither master nor pupil had ever wearied for a minute. When his daughter left him Monsieur de Bauville leant back in his chair and said to himself, 'If she were a boy she would make a stir in the world, but the limits of a female mind are soon reached ;' and he resumed his interrupted work. But a new sensation was stirring within him : he experienced a feeling of paternal pride in proving his daughter to be possessed of the faculties which he recognised in himself—accuracy, clearness, strength, and perseverance. He fancied he still heard Elizabeth's grateful voice saying, 'Thank you, papa,' as she left the room, and the echo of these words distracted the mathematician at his work.

'I will take a walk,' he said, presently, with a touch of impatience in his voice ; and it was not till he had traversed the long avenue that the composure

which the discovery of his daughter's talent had disturbed came back to him.

'This first lesson was easier to the young student than those which followed.'

'Elizabeth will forget to eat and drink,' said her brothers presently amongst themselves, when they sent up their plates a third time before she had finished her first help.

Henri waited in vain for the companion of his walks : a great disappointment was awaiting the old drawing master ; the girl's portfolio was not enriched with any new study. All her powers were devoted to mathematics. Formerly she had only worked in secret, forcing her way alone through every difficulty. Now her favourite occupation had suddenly become an imperative duty.

'My father must be satisfied,' she would say to herself, and she no longer thought of anything else.

Marc murmured loudly : 'It is too bad! To have but one father and one sister, and to find oneself face to face with two calculating machines.'

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

'How many fathers have people generally?' he demanded.

But his natural reserve increased daily ; he gave himself up more and more to solitary pleasures—to

fishing in the pond in the early morning — to long rambles in the woods with a gun in his hand, though he brought no game home; and in walking through the forest he often sighed and thought, as Marc did also, of the delicate mother, who never left the garden, but who had been always ready to listen to the nonsense, or to receive the confidences of her children.

'The boys are always happy in the country,' said Elizabeth when, shut up in her garret, she was visited by feelings of compunction.

She at least was happy, for she worked with unbounded ardour and enthusiasm, sometimes stimulated by her father's contempt for a feminine intelligence, sometimes by the impatience he manifested when she did not at once understand his explanations, and sometimes, too, by the cold approval he occasionally accorded to her work.

The bow-string was stretched to its utmost ; but Elizabeth did not perceive this ; she no longer lived in the realities of the earth. She moved in an atmosphere of calculation and discovery, forgetting her humble everyday duties in her great efforts to accompany her father in those severe scientific studies to which he had for so long devoted his life, in disregard of all human sympathy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ACCIDENT.

WO months had passed, and the vacation was nearly ended. It was Monsieur de Bauville's custom to return to Paris at the same time that his sons returned to college.

The young folks were making the most of their last days of liberty. They were much liked and very popular in the neighbourhood, and were never without invitations to hunting parties and out-of-door gatherings, and their days from morning till night were spent in the woods. Elizabeth and her father had frequently tête-à-tête breakfasts, as Henri often went with his brothers. He was too young to possess a gun, and too timid to borrow one from a friend. Indeed, it was only with a great effort that he repressed a scream if some one near him unexpectedly fired ; and no effort could have prevented him from covering his eyes with his hands when a wounded rabbit or partridge dropped down

at his feet. His timidity often brought him into real danger. Sometimes in his terror he would place himself directly in the line of the shot, and more than once Marc or Pierre, throwing down his gun in anger, had seized the child, exclaiming, ‘Get out of the way ; you will get killed. It would be much better for you to stay at home with Elizabeth.’

Henri would sigh without replying. Elizabeth never thought of him now, and he got tired of walking about by himself, or gathering flowers and working in the garden alone. It was better to go with his brothers at the risk of being scolded, or even wounded perhaps.

One day Elizabeth was deep in a complicated problem ; her father had explained to her the course to follow, and she was the more eager to satisfy him because he had been impatient the same morning on finding several errors in her work, and had remarked contemptuously, ‘You will never do any good after all.’

She was hard at work now with her hair pushed behind her ears, and the earnestness of her face showing how eager she was to succeed.

All at once distant sounds arose at the entrance of the wood, and grew every minute more distinct. Old Marianne came out of the kitchen shading her eyes with her hand, and trying to find out what was the

matter. Marc appeared, pale and disordered, and stained with blood, accompanied by a number of people, carrying a child who seemed to have fainted. The young man staggered. Marianne thought she saw some one near offer to relieve him of his burden, but he refused to give it up.

The old woman grew alarmed; her first impulse was to hurry out, but her limbs bent under her.

The hunters were approaching, their revolvers in their belts and the dogs at their heels.

It was indeed Henri, who was carried by his brother. His eyes were closed and his head had fallen back, and one of his arms hung down heavily.

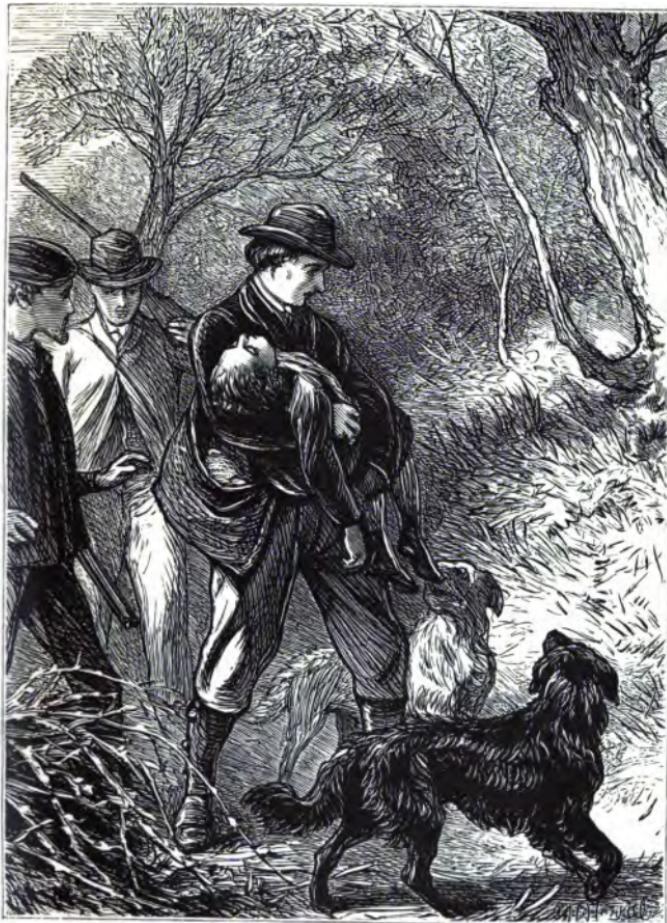
'He is dead, Marianne; and I have killed him!' said Marc, in a hoarse voice, as the eager group entered the house.

Marianne had recovered the use of her limbs as well as her presence of mind.

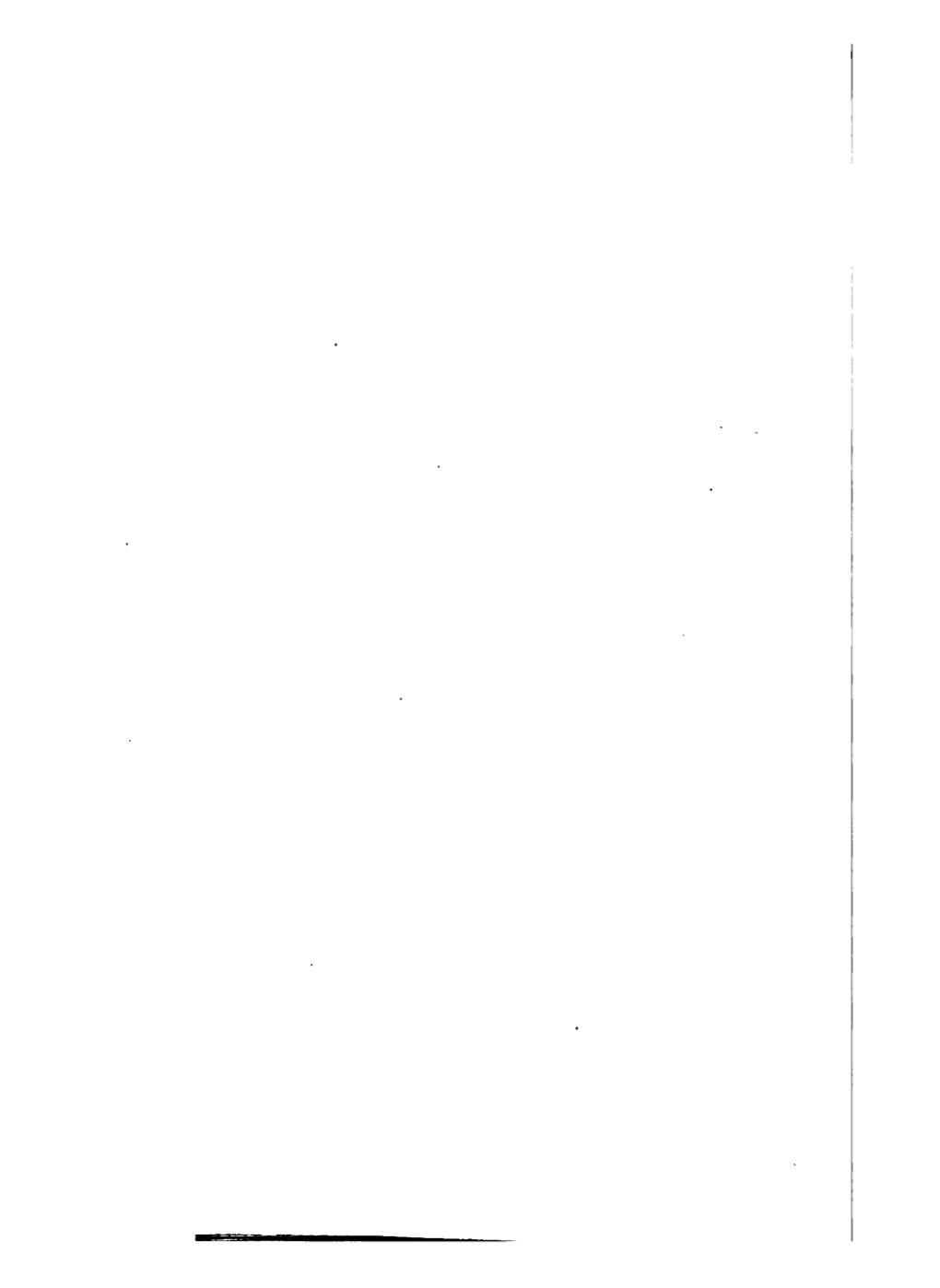
'Come in here,' she said, opening the door of Monsieur de Bauville's room, the only one on the ground floor. Then, bending over the child's cold face for a minute—a minute of terrible silence—she said, 'He is not dead. Has a doctor been sent for?'

In the first alarm, while they undressed the poor wounded child, no one had thought of informing the

[To face p. 42



HENRI'S ACCIDENT



father, and Monsieur de Bauville did not hear the noise in the house. But Elizabeth had not yet reached that point of learned indifference which would make her deaf to these unusual sounds. The steps of the hunters resounding through the silent house brought the young girl from her work ; she listened for a minute ; then, without giving a second look at the calculation she had almost finished, she went rapidly down stairs, guided by the confused voices. When she entered the large room where the hunters and the dogs were all assembled together, they drew back to give place to the young lady.

‘Pierre,’ said she, turning towards her second brother, always stronger and calmer than the elder, ‘What has happened to Henri?’

Marc did not leave his brother time to answer.

‘He followed us, as he has done so often in spite of all we could say. We were on the look-out. I thought he was with Pierre, but he was crossing the copse to rejoin me. I saw the leaves move, and, thinking it was a rabbit, I fired.’ The young man’s voice suddenly fell, and he hid his face in his hands.

Elizabeth looked for fuller information to the bystanders, and addressed herself to an old keeper whom she had known from her infancy.

'And now?' said she.

'Now,' said the old man, 'I see only an arm broken. He is not hit anywhere else. But he is very weak. I wish he would open his eyes.'

Elizabeth suppressed the cry that rose to her lips as she heard these words.

She approached the child, whom Marianne had not dared to examine. 'Bring vinegar,' said she; 'and let everyone leave the room—except Marc,' added Elizabeth, turning on her brother a look so expressive of both grief and sympathy, that the young man again hid his face in his hands.

When the doctor arrived some minutes later, Henri had opened his eyes and had murmured a few unconnected words; but every time Elizabeth bent over him to listen she always caught the same plaintive moan, 'Mamma! I want mamma!'

CHAPTER VII.

REPENTANCE.

MARC was promptly delivered from his greatest terror—his brother was not killed ; it was only his arm that was broken. The doctor had refused to touch the child except in the presence of his father.

‘He will be of no use,’ the gentlemen of the hunt assured him, but Dr. Lebreton insisted ; and Monsieur de Bauville seated himself beside his little boy’s bed and saw the broken arm set before enquiring how the accident occurred.

‘How happened it that Henri was with you at all since he does not shoot ? And how was it that Marc was so awkward as to hit him ?’ he asked.

Marc smiled bitterly at his father’s astonishment, and Monsieur de Bauville’s look of contempt helped to raise a new barrier between the savant and his eldest son.

It was late before the operation was accomplished and the exhausted child asleep.

Monsieur de Bauville invited all the people who had accompanied his son home to take refreshment before they left; and Marianne was busy preparing food for the unexpected guests. Thus Elizabeth remained alone beside the bed. The young girl sat with compressed lips and clasped hands, retracing in her mind the life she had led during the last month, without extenuating, without seeking an excuse for it. It was not merely the desire to be with her father which had impelled her to devote herself, body and soul, to the studies that she shared with him. It was not even the hope of being able to help her brothers some day. She had allowed herself to be led away by a selfish passion, without remembering that the comfort of her brothers depended on her, that the care and protection of Henri had been confided to her by her mother's last wish. Elizabeth hated herself with all her heart, and was very near hating mathematics also.

'I will never look at another problem,' said she, in her bitter repentance; 'it is not a woman's business;' and she blushed as she remembered how pleased and proud she had felt because she was occupying herself

with work that was considered above the capacity of her sex.

'A good girl, a good sister, has no need to do that to make herself loved. If I had kept Henri beside me he would not have been hurt, and Marc would not have had his conscience burdened with remorse.' Elizabeth had as much reason to be uneasy about Marc as about Henri.

The young man, who was obliged to return to Paris to resume his studies, left La Treille sullen and angry.

Monsieur de Bauville was detained in the country by Henri's accident, and he allowed his son to go without a word of sympathy or affection—without even a look to efface the impression of his reproach.

Marc was of a light and pleasure-loving nature, but generally docile and frank. His instinctive shrinking from sorrow and trouble impelled him to seek any kind of distraction to escape from the self-reproach that oppressed him. He had never been taught to trust in God, or to pray to Him. No one indeed in that family knew how to seek consolation there. Elizabeth had not time to write, even if she had not been too reserved to explain in a letter what she could not put into words. She felt herself much more to blame for the accident even than Marc was, and she

reproached herself more for her long neglect than she did her brother for his heedlessness. But she had said nothing of this to Marc. Pierre was wrapped up in his own occupations. Their college duties, as well as their recreations, separated the two brothers, who seldom sought each other, and it was therefore with his schoolfellows that Marc lived, and in their society that he tried to forget the child who was suffering at La Treille.

Some of these friends were, like himself, kind and well intentioned, but weak and pleasure-loving. Others were more dangerous, ready to lead into evil ways those who could not resist temptation. Hitherto the thought of his mother had frequently strengthened Marc to turn aside from wrong doing; but now he wanted distraction at any cost. He read the worthless books they gave him, he betted and gambled, did little work, and that little badly. The gun-shot which had broken Henri's arm had done his brother a still more serious injury in burdening his conscience with a weight that he had not strength to bear.

Elizabeth also felt sometimes as if her heart could not contain all her grief and repentance. When she saw Henri pale and thin, sleeping little and eating nothing, tired of every amusement she proposed, and

turning away his head, and often weeping, solitude seemed to her unbearable.

'If I could only ask somebody's pardon!' she would exclaim to herself. A dozen times she had said to the poor little invalid—

'Oh, if I had but kept you with me! How sorry I am that I did not take you into the wood, instead of letting you go to the hunt!'

And poor Henri's frequent attempts to console his repentant sister were always fruitless.

Monsieur de Bauville had become even more inaccessible than ever, on finding that Elizabeth allowed her care for the wounded child to take the place of her study of mathematics.

One evening while Henri slept she succeeded in working out the problem upon which she had been engaged on the day of the accident, and placed it on her father's table as a farewell tribute to their favourite science, but he appeared to take no other notice of it than to say, ironically,—

'If you insist on playing the part of nurse in Marianne's place it is your own concern.'

Elizabeth had worked alone, and now she suffered and repented alone. Just when she had begun to understand the happiness of having a mother she had lost

her. Her earthly father was nothing to her, and the poor child did not yet know her heavenly Father. Devotion to Henri was the sole thing that brought her satisfaction and peace of mind. The more capricious and irritable illness and pain rendered the little fellow, the more willingly did she apply herself to the expiatory task of soothing and pleasing him. A great longing to sacrifice herself arose within her, but as yet she was only groping in the dark. She did not know what suffering, what duties, and what noble pleasures God had reserved for her in the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONVALESCENCE.

AUTUMN was passing away, sadly and drearily; the leaves, beaten about by the wind, dropped from the trees and were swept in eddies down the avenue, passing like phantoms before the eyes of Elizabeth as she sat sewing at the window. In her remorse for having neglected her modest feminine duties, she had taken upon herself the charge of the household mending, which was becoming too much for Marianne. At first the old woman had smiled at her a little scornfully, but Elizabeth was a persevering pupil, and her initiation into the difficulties of darning went on successfully. But it was an effort to her—for the young girl was not naturally neat-handed—and her strong, clear mind, never satisfied with imperfection, brought to bear on her needle-work the same love of exactness and of finish that had enabled

her to feel such keen enjoyment in the study of mathematics, and she was not easily satisfied.

Henri was amused to see her at her sewing. ‘Papa will never perceive that his stockings are much better mended than usual,’ said he, smiling. ‘I am sure Marianne could never have done that fine darn on my shirt. I do believe you pass your needle in and out as many times as the weaver does his shuttle.’

Elizabeth laughed, for the little invalid was perfectly right.

‘I try,’ said she, ‘but my thread is not so fine as the thread in the cloth, and I have not quite succeeded.’

If Henri had been able to move his arm he would have clapped his hands in triumph, so proud was he of having made such a sensible and knowing observation.

Elizabeth mended the linen, and walked with Henri when the weather permitted. The child after a time became very weary of his long confinement and of having nothing to do, and she began to give him lessons. She had learnt the rudiments of Latin long ago from her English governess, and this enabled her for the present to teach Henri, who was not advanced for his age. She played draughts and dominoes with him, read aloud, and even tried to tell him stories, but Henri yawned at these recitals, and sometimes even went to sleep over

them, for Elizabeth had not enough imagination to make a good story teller.

'Tell me one of the stories mamma used to tell us,' he asked one day, but Elizabeth had forgotten them.

The shock that the child had experienced had greatly injured his health. He had a bad cough, and he used his broken arm so little that Elizabeth feared it would always be weak.

The tears had risen to Henri's eyes when his sister told him she had forgotten the stories he wanted, but presently he felt a little ashamed of having been so vexed, and a brilliant idea occurred to him.

'I will try to write out one of mamma's stories myself!' he exclaimed. 'I remember the one about Prince Loquésigre and Princess Petronell very well; it was in that one that a little girl carried a young calf in her apron. When I read it to you it will perhaps make you recollect the others.'

And Henri, quite proud of the task he had undertaken, was soon comfortably settled in a corner of his sofa, the injured arm resting on a cushion, an atlas on his knees for a desk, and an inkstand and writing paper on a little round table beside him—everything had been thought of by Elizabeth. He dipped his pen in the ink with an air of triumph.

'You will soon see how pretty it will be,' he said, with his pale face already flushed with pleasure.

The colour had come into Elizabeth's cheek too. She had taken out of her work-basket a paper which she had not touched for some time. While Henri was writing his story his sister was working a problem in algebra. The young girl had not absolutely renounced mathematics.

'Who knows but good may come of it one day,' thought she. 'If papa's eyesight should get bad, I might be of use to him as his secretary.'

But Elizabeth's conscience was too upright, and her will too energetic to permit her to be a second time led away from her duty by the charms of study. She worked in moderation—with enthusiasm indeed, but at the same time with self-control. While pondering her problem she looked at Henri from time to time, and there was no need for the child to arouse her attention when he turned to her with a distressed face, saying, as he looked at his feeble and trembling fingers, 'I did not think my right hand was so weak; I suppose the left has drained all its strength. I am so dreadfully tired with writing.'

And he gazed sorrowfully at his blotted pages, which

were covered with an irregular sort of writing not much in accordance with the laws of caligraphy.

Elizabeth put her own papers back into her basket as she rose and with a smile took up the little fellow's manuscript.

' You are quite worn out with making all these hieroglyphics,' said she. ' If you like to rest we will go and make a great heap of dried leaves at the end of the avenue, and when we come in you shall tell me the story, and then I will write it out for you and you shall correct it.'

The idea of this novel occupation revived the little invalid, but he was still more delighted at the thought of the heap of leaves.

' Let us set fire to it ! ' he exclaimed, brightening with pleasure.

' If we do, it must be done in the wood, or we shall perhaps burn our old elms. Make haste ! go and get your coat; I will help you to put it on.'

The poor left arm was still in a sling, and the preparation for a walk was not such a simple affair for Henri as it was with Marc, who persisted in going out in the depth of winter without an overcoat, maintaining that he ought to accustom himself to all weathers, since he was to be a soldier.

Henri shuddered as he reminded Elizabeth of this fancy of his elder brother. ‘He declares that officers never put on a coat over their uniform. How was it, then, that they did not all die of cold in the Russian campaign?’ asked the child.

‘I do not think the discipline was quite so severe then,’ said Elizabeth, laughing. ‘There were probably many officers who wore fur pelisses. But I remember hearing my grandfather tell how one of the Marshals of the Emperor Napoleon, I forget which, went through the whole campaign at the head of his column in the fearful cold, under which the men and their horses fell in thousands, in full uniform, without ever putting on an overcoat. The soldiers were astonished. “It keeps me warm to see the Marshal like that,” said some of the troopers. Others declared it froze them to look at him. Two Generals asked him one day what he was made of, to bear such a season without covering himself up. The Marshal laughed, as he said in a low tone, “I have been more cunning than you: I have made a shirt of my pelisse, and I wear the fury side next to me!”’

Henri was much amused at this story, and laughed so loud that the old crows asleep in their nests at the top of the trees woke up, and began to caw discordantly.

'Then he was just like a bear underneath,' said the child.

'Not at all,' said his sister, laughing with him. 'He was like a bear that had turned his skin. When you are very cold I will make you a Russian shirt out of the big muff that is at the furrier's.' And they ran along, laughing and talking, towards the wood.

Thomas was an old-fashioned gardener, who never knew very much about his business, and who had grown stupid, partly with age, and partly because his master cared so little what he did. In the kitchen-garden he cultivated a few cabbages, beans, and onions, but he never attempted to gather together the fallen leaves, that he might protect the delicate plants with them. They lay untouched, dry, and yellow in the little wood ; and the two rakes that Elizabeth brought with her were soon at work.

There had been no rain for some days ; the leaves were dry and crisp, and a good blaze might be looked for. But the heap did not grow very rapidly. Henri had to work with one arm only, and his feeble efforts produced very little result. Elizabeth raked away vigorously ; but the wood was large and the leaves were thinly scattered ; they might, perhaps, have found a better crop if they had been nearer the trees. Not-

withstanding all their labour the heap was still but small, and they were getting too hot to laugh, when Henri saw his father coming down the avenue, absorbed, as usual, in his reflections, and not seeing his children. The little boy hesitated a minute, and then ran to meet Monsieur de Bauville. Owing to his delicacy during his recovery from his accident, Henri continued to be a privileged person, and often asked little favours from his father, which were generally granted. He had in this way grown to be less timid with him, and, taking Monsieur de Bauville now by the hand, he brought him into the wood, saying to him, ‘Papa, we want to make a heap of dried leaves to set on fire. I have only one arm, and so I can only gather a few at a time. Elizabeth does what she can, but we do not get on fast. Do help us, papa ! you are so strong.’

Monsieur de Bauville smiled. In his youth, before he had given himself up to the work which had bent his tall figure, worn out his eyesight, and weakened his limbs, he had taken pleasure in being strong and agile. He took the rake that Henri offered him, and began to work so vigorously that the distant slopes were soon stripped of their carpet of leaves, and a mass of varied material, dead wood and dry moss, that promised to burn better even than the leaves, was soon added to

the heap by his exertions. Elizabeth, working as hard as she could, was getting hot and very tired. Henri, after running in great delight from one to the other, at length called out, ‘There is enough, papa, quite enough. The heap is as high as our neighbour’s house. We could not burn it all if we remained here till evening.’

Elizabeth had remembered to bring a match, and in an instant the flames rose clear and bright, illuminating the tops of the fine trees and the dark masses of the wood.

La Treille stood out at the end of the avenue in this strong light. Marianne and Thomas and his wife ran out of the house, alarmed by the unusual brightness, and not doubting that there was a fire in the village. In the distance they saw Elizabeth and Henri, helped by their father, pushing back into the fire the leaves that blew away or fell burning on the grass.

Marianne wiped her eyes in silence. ‘If he was but more with his children!’ thought she.

Thomas watched his master in great amazement. ‘Rich folks have curious ideas about amusement,’ grumbled the old man to his wife as he went in to finish his interrupted dinner.

Monsieur de Bauville was tired when he returned to his study. The problem which he had reserved for

the work of the evening turned out more complicated than he had expected. He fell asleep in his arm-chair, and then awoke with a start, ashamed of his unwonted idleness. Then he heard Elizabeth's voice reading Henri to sleep, and he murmured to himself, 'The child is not so pale as he was. How he laughed to-day when he saw the flames rise above the elms !'

CHAPTER IX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

MONSIEUR DE BAUVILLE began to speak of their return to Paris. Elizabeth felt divided between her wish to remain in the country on account of Henri's health and her desire to see for herself how Marc was going on in Paris. The young man's obstinate silence and the bad class-reports that came to his father at the end of every month made her very grave as she sat alone and thought about it; but as usual she did not speak to anyone of her anxiety.

Monsieur de Bauville in his growing tenderness for his little boy seemed quite to overlook his daughter. He had not forgiven her for her desertion of mathematics.

'She is just like all women,' he said to himself: 'inconstant and light; they must be left to their nursery and their housekeeping.' And he reproached his daughter for

the devotion she lavished on Henri. ‘To neglect everything for a broken arm!’ he exclaimed, though, perhaps, his displeasure was not unmixed with compunction when he saw Elizabeth performing the duties which he himself had neglected all his life.

Marianne had received orders for the departure of the family to Paris, and she began to put the garret in order. Elizabeth’s retreat was dismantled; the packing-cases were moved into the ante-room, and the old housekeeper called to her young mistress, who was her pupil in housekeeping,—

‘Come, Mademoiselle, you who can calculate so well will tell us if we have brought down enough boxes.’

Elizabeth laughed goodnaturedly at the joke, but after deciding the question of the boxes she stood leaning on one of the beams that supported the old chestnut wood-work, and looked thoughtfully at her old sanctum with its straw chair and little table, and the old carpet hung over one of the joists, now exposed to public view. She had been happy there: perhaps she ought not to have been—but she had been happy. In this dusty little retreat she had tasted the intense delight of study, and had enjoyed the rapid development of her intellectual faculties. Since Henri’s accident she had never entered her garret: when she

had done any work it was done on the corner of his table or at the foot of his bed ; but she did not despise the memory of the past in her energetic determination to do her duty in the present. ‘What I learned here is not lost,’ said she to herself; ‘the day will perhaps come when I shall be very glad that I have worked like an enthusiast.’ The day indeed was nearer than she thought.

In the country the arrival of the post is a great event. At Paris Monsieur de Bauville never disturbed himself about peace or war ; he often left his newspapers unopened for days, and would not have taken two steps out of his study to inquire about the most important public news. But at La Treille he was always in the avenue when the postman came, and if the man did not quicken his steps he smiled approvingly when Henri, delighted to take upon himself the business of distributing the letters and newspapers, ran forward to meet him.

On the morning of the day before their intended departure for Paris the child, with an air of great disappointment, brought only one letter which was for his father, who put it into his pocket without opening it.

‘If it had been for you,’ whispered Henri, hanging as usual on Elizabeth’s arm, ‘you would at least have

told us the news, but papa will not read his letter till to-morrow, and he will tell us nothing that is in it.'

Elizabeth smiled. 'My father's letters are letters either of business or of science, which would not interest you,' said she ; but Henri went on grumbling.

Breakfast passed in silence. Henri crossed and uncrossed his legs and fidgeted on his chair. 'His strength is coming back,' thought the sister. 'A fortnight ago he would have been more patient,' and she began to think the little boy's manners were not improving. The meal was no sooner over than Henri made Elizabeth go with him into the garden.

'Let us take a long walk,' said he ; 'to-morrow we shall see nothing but walls all round us, and instead of the sound of the crows we shall only hear the noise of carriages. However it does not matter much ; it rained a great deal too often last week, and I shall not be sorry to be at college again. What a long time it is since we saw Marc and Pierre !'

Elizabeth sighed ; she wanted to keep the little fellow at home. 'If I dared I would propose to my father to send him to college only as a day pupil,' she thought to herself, as she walked beside him. 'I would make him work at home ; and indeed he is so delicate that the country would be best for him still.'

But, brave though she was, Elizabeth was not bold enough to talk to her father about Henri's health ; she shrank equally from his cold sarcasms and his dry refusal of her request.

'I have a great deal to do to-day,' said she presently, when they came towards the house. 'You must not keep me here, little lazy one. Instead of pattering about in the mud, it would be better for us both to go in and pack our trunks. Do you think that Marianne can manage everything alone ?'

'That is true,' cried Henri, delighted with this new idea. 'She would never know how to pack my nests and the eggs. I must have a box on purpose for my collection. I will go to the wood-house for some saw-dust : I saw a heap there this morning, quite clean and nice.' And the child set off in great glee towards the little shed he was pleased to call the 'wood-house.'

Elizabeth had entered the house, and had stopped in the narrow passage to hang up her wet shawl. She was standing near the door of her father's study when she fancied she heard a stifled groan. She hesitated an instant, listened again, and then knocked. There was no answer, and the sound that had attracted her seemed to grow more distinct. She opened the door. Monsieur de Bauville was seated in his chair at his

accustomed place, with his back turned to the door; but his head was leaning forward on the desk, his arms were hanging down, and he was breathing heavily and with difficulty.

Elizabeth hurried forward and placed her hand on her father's forehead: for a moment she thought all consciousness was gone. His face was changed, his eyes fixed, and his arm fell a dead weight when she let go the cold hand she had taken.

In spite of her inexperience the poor girl at once comprehended the nature of the terrible blow that had struck her father. He had been seized with paralysis. Elizabeth had often sighed over the loneliness of her life. How isolated did she feel now in the presence of this living corpse—all that was left to her of her father !

[To face p. 66



DEATH OF MONSIEUR DE BAUVILLE

CHAPTER X.

REVELATIONS.

LIZABETH had called for help, and Monsieur de Bauville was undressed and put to bed. For the second time within three months a messenger was sent on horseback at full speed to fetch a doctor, Marianne, meanwhile, hastily applying such simple remedies as her experience suggested. Elizabeth, on her knees beside the bed, tried to warm her father's icy hands between her own. She thought that he retained some consciousness. His eyes seemed to rest on her with painful persistency; and when Henri, trembling and alarmed, for an instant appeared at the door, only, however, to fly away again after the first glance, the young girl believed that she saw upon the poor distorted face an expression of increased distress. While, with an instinctive feeling of tenderness and protection, she pressed her father's helpless hands to her breast, her

attention was drawn to an open letter lying on the floor. It was the letter that had come by the post that morning. Elizabeth recognised the colour of the paper as she placed it on the table. It seemed to her that Monsieur de Bauville's look followed all her movements uneasily, and that he tried to speak. But the tongue remained silent; the lips moved without articulating a syllable: some hoarse sounds alone bore evidence to his distress. His daughter placed her hand gently on his mouth in the hope of calming him, as Marianne, with the doctor, entered the room.

All that Dr. Lebreton's skill could do was useless; remedy after remedy was applied, but all in vain: the rigid limbs did not move, the eyes remained fixed, and the doctor could not even answer Elizabeth's question, 'Is my father conscious?'

'I do not know,' was the frank reply; 'the soul is a region beyond the reach of human science. What is passing now between your father and God is known only to Him.'

Elizabeth coloured, for she had not been thinking of her father's soul. She had never asked herself yet in this terrible danger if the immortal spirit was ready to return to Him who gave it, purified from all earthly taint: she had been exclusively occupied in thinking

of the cause of the illness, in asking herself what sudden shock could have produced such an effect upon him. She wondered if he had thought of his children—of Henri, of herself. The doctor's simple reply made her for the first time remember that there were higher and more important questions to be answered than these. She did not as yet know much about religion, and did not think of eternity with that unshaken faith which is the only thing necessary for salvation. But she felt that Dr. Lebreton saw further and with a purer vision than she did; and in the midst of her anguish beside the death-bed of her father, she felt pained and humiliated.

'Do you know if anything has occurred to bring this on?' the doctor asked her. 'Has your father received any bad news?'

Instinctively Elizabeth's eyes turned towards the letter on the table.

'Is that a letter? Did it come by this morning's post? Have you read it?'

Elizabeth shook her head.

'My father received it at breakfast, and he put it in his pocket unopened,' she said.

'He read it in his study, and you found him struck down by this attack,' rapidly continued the doctor.

'We must know what is in that letter. It is impossible to cure the body without knowing what occupies the mind. Besides,' and the kind man could not keep back a sigh, 'if it is about business, you will be obliged to look at it; your father can attend to nothing now.'

Elizabeth hesitated no longer, but rose and went to the window with the letter in her hand.

The short light of a December day was rapidly passing away. The shadow of night was falling on the earth, and the outer darkness seemed only a type of the darkness that was falling on Elizabeth's life.

She had only read a few lines when she turned towards the doctor, saying in a plaintive tone: 'I do not understand it.'

The old man went to her. He had known her from her childhood, and had loved her father in his youth, before the passion to which he had exclusively devoted himself had shut up Monsieur de Bauville's heart, and isolated him from his friends as well as from his family.

He bent over the letter, trying in the growing darkness to read it.

'Somebody has gone off—a banker or a cashier; I do not know which. I suppose my father has lost some money;' and the young girl turned towards the bed as if reproaching the dying man for giving way

under such a blow as that, when he had seen his wife lying dead before him without emotion.

Dr. Lebreton shook his head sadly as he tried to decipher the writing.

'You think money is of no consequence. You are young and do not know what poverty is; I hope you never may. Nothing is said here of the effect of the flight of the scoundrel on your father's fortune; but it is clear the loss is great or it would never have had this effect on him.'

Dr. Lebreton checked himself. He was well acquainted with Monsieur de Bauville's affairs, and knew that he had nothing to leave to his son but the small estate of La Treille. If the banker had gone off with capital, it was the fortune of Marie Delahais that was lost, and her children were ruined.

Elizabeth returned to the bed without understanding the doctor's words or almost hearing them.

In spite of her grief and anxiety the reading of the letter had relieved her from a vague terrible apprehension. Till then she had been haunted by one fear alone. Had her brother Marc done anything wrong? Had he got into any trouble or disgrace? Elizabeth had no confidence either in Marc's good sense or strength of character; but the knowledge that her father's letter

was about nothing but the loss of money had left her relieved—almost happy.

She knelt beside the bed, holding her father's hands, and whispering to him in tender caressing accents as one consoles a child. Illness and powerlessness had suddenly reversed the relations of father and daughter. There arose in the breast of the young girl a yearning desire to protect the grave, severe man who had lately been so unapproachable in his intellectual strength.

'Never mind if you have lost money,' she murmured softly to him; 'you and I will work for the boys. It will all come right; there is nothing to fear.'

Then her thought suddenly reverted to the gloomy prospects opened before her by Dr. Lebreton's words, and she added: 'Trust in God: He will take pity on us.'

The night came on. The doctor still remained in the house. He knew, what the young girl was ignorant of, though Marianne guessed it, that the end was near,—that the fixed eyes would never regain their intelligence, and that the silence of death would soon be between the cold unloving father and the children he had so culpably neglected.

Elizabeth had left the room for a few minutes to put

Henri to bed. She had found the poor child lying on the floor before the fire in the drawing-room, where, frightened and tired of his loneliness, he had cried himself to sleep.

When his sister took him in her arms he clung to her neck as he asked, 'Is papa asleep ?'

And when she answered 'No,' he pressed himself still closer to her.

'I will not say good-night to him,' he whispered ; 'his great eyes frighten me !'

Alas ! the great eyes were already closed for ever.

When Elizabeth returned to her father's room the doctor was gently pressing his hand on the still half open eyelids. The girl understood immediately ; her strong clear mind admitted no delusions. She fell on her knees near the bed, putting her lips gently and tenderly on the cold hand.

At twenty-one Elizabeth and her brothers were left alone in the world, with a future before them that was to be full of sorrow and difficulty.

CHAPTER XI.

CHANGES.

 LIZABETH'S lot was a very sad one. Her deep mourning dress for her mother was not yet laid aside, and now her father too was dead.

She was alone in the country in the depth of winter, uncertain if her brothers could arrive in time to render the last duties to him who had not bade them adieu.

She awaited with anxiety the result of the message which the doctor had sent to Paris. The wind moaned in the great leafless forests; the snow lay thick on the ground: every necessity of their daily life, every homage to be rendered to the dead, presented almost insurmountable difficulties.

Henri lying in an arm-chair beside the fire, pale and nervous, added the fear of seeing him fall ill to Elizabeth's other sorrows.

Mercifully, however, she did not as yet turn her

thoughts to the future. She was at present only occupied with the coming of her brothers, and with anxiety lest they should not arrive before the funeral day; she calculated the times of the railway trains, she thought of the weather, the distance, the rigour of the season; all these things were incessantly in her mind. Twenty times during the day she left the drawing-room where she was taking charge of Henri, and went out for a few minutes into the little garden, regardless of the snow and the biting north-east wind. When at length she saw the post-chaise come struggling up the avenue, coachman and horses bending their heads before the violence of the wind, it seemed to her as if her heart was relieved of half its load.

'There are my brothers!' she exclaimed in a triumphant tone, and she ran to the entrance-hall to open the door herself, eagerly pushing aside Thomas, who was hastening to offer his services to the travellers.

The two young men entered the house looking grave and sad. No report of the cause of their father's illness had reached them, and they were in happy ignorance of the struggles that the future had in store for them. But they knew that they were henceforth to be alone in the world, and, however loose the ties of

natural affection between Monsieur de Bauville and his children might have been, however cold and unloving the mutual relations between the father and his sons, their hearts were very full when they found themselves without him, and became conscious of the blank caused by his death in that house which had so lately been ruled by his will.

Elizabeth and her brothers were all gathered round the fire on the evening of the day on which they had attended their father's funeral. They were now without any protector on earth. Monsieur de Bauville had been an only son. He had mortally offended his wife's relations, and the children knew nothing but the name of their Uncle Delahais, the proprietor of large iron works in the part of the country in which they lived. This uncle whom they had never seen resided twenty miles from La Treille. Madame de Bauville, in sorrowful obedience to the orders of her husband, had never talked to her children of any relations except those who were dead. Amongst the recollections of her childhood which she had loved to speak of in low tones to her little boy, her eldest brother occupied only a small place.

'Louis was very much older than I,' she always said.
'Louis used to laugh at me.'

And then she would suddenly change the subject, as if she feared she was touching on forbidden ground.

In their complete isolation the children had never once thought of this only relation who was left to them.

Dr. Lebreton's kindly nature and long experience of life made him very compassionate over the orphans who were so sadly desolate.

Their sorrow, indeed, was not very intense ; yet all of them were conscious of having suffered a great loss. The young people sat mournfully looking into the fire, while the doctor, who was with them, talked to Elizabeth in a low voice.

' You are of age, are you not ? ' he asked.

Elizabeth raised her head, and replied with a smile, ' I have that honour.' And her thoughts went back to her mother, who had often said to her, ' If you do not make haste you will be of age before you are married, and then no one will care whether you are twenty-one or twenty-eight.'

In spite of her own sad experience of conjugal life, Madame de Bauville always hoped to see her daughter make a marriage which should be happier than her own had been : she longed to see Elizabeth happy. But Elizabeth had other work to do now than to think of that.

'Then you can act for yourself independently of family advice, which is very fortunate. Do you know who is your brother's guardian ?'

The young girl raised her eyes in surprise. Never having had any experience of family protection, she had arranged in her own mind her plan for the new life she would lead, without thinking of legal obligations.

'We shall probably be poor,' she said to herself, 'and have to keep few servants. I will manage for the boys, and keep Henri with me. He shall go to college as a day pupil, and I myself will be his private tutor ; this will be less expensive than paying for his board, and it will be better for him. We will all walk together on Sundays, and come down here in the holidays. And when the time arrives for them to prepare for their examinations, I think I shall be able to help them ; meantime I will work with that object before me.'

This prospect of a calm and busy life, with Henri for her companion and mathematics for her occupation, had sustained Elizabeth in her grief and isolation. But now Dr. Lebreton's speech disarranged all her thoughts, though at first she hardly even understood what he meant.

'Family advice ! We have no family,' she said.

'I know, I know;' and the old doctor placed a kind hand on Elizabeth's arm. 'We must turn to distant cousins of your father'—and he hesitated—'if your Uncle Delahais is not mentioned as guardian.'

Elizabeth coloured.

'You know my father was not friends with him,' said she.

And then the two young men broke silence. '

'If my father has made a will,' said Pierre, with a certain accent of doubt, as if he could not feel by any means sure that Monsieur de Bauville would take that trouble for his children, 'he will have chosen Monsieur Thuran to be our guardian.'

Dr. Lebreton and Elizabeth looked at each other. Monsieur Thuran was the name mentioned in the fatal letter; he was the banker who had forfeited confidence and honour.

Pierre continued: 'One day he came out of my father's study when I was reading in the little drawing-room, and he smiled and put one of his fat hands on my head, and said, "What would you think if I were one day to be your guardian?" I shook him off, and he laughed again, and went away. I am sure he had just come from talking to my father about it.'

'Why did you never tell me that?' exclaimed Marc, with astonishment.

'One needn't talk of everything,' replied Pierre.

Marc, unlike his brother, always did talk of everything.

Elizabeth had passed her arm round Henri's neck, who was almost asleep in his arm-chair.

'Monsieur Thurau shall never be your guardian,' said she to her elder brothers.

'How do you know that?' cried Marc, a little disposed, notwithstanding his natural good-humour, to be angry, because Elizabeth and Pierre knew more about the family affairs than he did. 'I am the eldest,' he thought.

Elizabeth had opened her father's secretary. Within it were half-worked problems, abstruse calculations, geometrical diagrams, and in the midst of the confusion the crumpled letter, which she handed to her brothers. Dr. Lebreton leant over the young men's shoulders as they read it. Like Elizabeth, Marc at first scarcely understood it, for Monsieur de Bauville never told his sons anything about his affairs.

Pierre knitted his brows, and turning quickly to the doctor, asked curtly, 'Does it mean ruin?'

Dr. Lebreton shrugged his shoulders. 'That is what

we cannot tell,' said he. 'Your father probably did not know to what extent he was a loser, but the loss is evidently great, since it caused his——'

'His illness and his death—I see,' replied Pierre; and he remained standing before the fire, his head resting on his hands in deep thought.

Marc had instinctively drawn near Henri as if to protect him, and had touched his injured arm with a caressing hand. All the follies and idle amusements which the young man had indulged in for the last two months rose before him, and filled him with remorse now that he was face to face with these serious realities.

As he stood so, Elizabeth came to his side and stole her hand into his, and looked into his face with eyes which, though they were sad, were so full of courage and hope that a little of her spirit passed into Marc, and made him stronger and calmer. He pressed his sister's hand, happier at this sad time than Pierre, who never thought of lightening the load of the others, but stood alone fronting his cloudy future.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHT.

T was not long before everything was known. Each day's post brought fresh disclosures of the state of affairs, and the poor orphans were plunged into the deepest distress.

The entire management of his affairs had been placed by Monsieur de Bauville in the hands of his friend and banker, Monsieur Thuron, who was also by his will appointed guardian to his children. The will contained a long and minute enumeration of all the property devolving on the four heirs, which now read like cruel mockery, for everything was lost. The faithless guardian had embezzled the entire fortune of his friend's children, and involved them in his own ruin.

The marriage of Monsieur and Madame de Bauville had been one of interest, and their children were destined never to enjoy the fortune resulting from that unhappy union.

If Marie Delahais had been portionless, Monsieur de Bauville would never have married her : but she was rich, and the marriage was considered a suitable one. The poor lady, however, had led an unhappy life, and now her children were reduced to poverty.

The ruin that had overtaken them was so complete that absolutely nothing was left except the small estate of La Treille. The old rustic country house, with its few surrounding fields and meadows, constituted now their sole inheritance. After having been brought up, if not in luxury, yet in all the abundance of an ample fortune, they were left with no provision in the world but one small plot of earth.

As these terrible facts became clear to them the two eldest boys grew very grave. Marc was full of self-reproach for the time he had wasted ; he felt how far he was from being able to support himself, and he looked forward with dismay to the loss of all the pleasures of that gay and brilliant life which he had hoped to lead. On leaving St. Cyr his rank would be only that of an ensign, and he would have nothing but his pay to live upon. He had grown up with different expectations, and his thoughts as he dwelt on all that was before them were sad enough. But he was of an affectionate and easy temper, and he

listened without saying much to all Elizabeth's plans for their future life. Once, however, he was roused to opposition.

'I have been thinking,' said the girl, 'that it will be necessary to sell La Treille ;' and her voice trembled a little.

'To sell La Treille !' cried Marc, starting to his feet. All the instincts of an eldest son rose up against the thought. He had often in past times laughed at the small inconvenient house, and declared that when it came into his possession he would pull it down and build a château. He used to look with contempt on the modest little place, surrounded as it was by the large estates of opulent neighbours ; but now he regarded it with pride as an inheritance which had descended in a direct line from father to son through long generations of Bauvilles, and the trees, the fields, the old house, had all acquired a sacred character in his eyes. 'Sell La Treille !' he repeated ; 'you surely cannot think of such a thing, Elizabeth ?'

His sister shook her head : she had thought about it only too much.

Pierre had been sitting silent, buried in his own thoughts ; but as Marc spoke he rose, and going up to Elizabeth, he looked at her enquiringly.

'If it were not that you must both go on with your studies and complete your course at college,' she continued, 'I think we could all have lived more economically here than in Paris. But you must work, and we must keep together. When this family council of which they speak has been called together, I hope we shall see a little more clearly into our affairs. We have nothing very bad to fear now, thank God! and when we know what La Treille will sell for'—she pressed Marc's arm, who made an impatient movement—'we can establish ourselves at Paris, in a small lodging near the college; then you can attend your classes, and I will manage the housekeeping, and see to Henri's lessons. If we spend nothing but what is absolutely necessary, I hope we shall have enough; but if we were to let La Treille, I think—I am almost sure that the rent would not be enough to live on. That is why I think it must be sold.'

It had cost Elizabeth a great effort to come to this sad conclusion. La Treille was dearer to her than it was to Marc, although he was the eldest son; dearer to her than to Henri, though the dreamy and poetic nature of the child made him cling to the country as to his natural home. As for Pierre, he cared for no

place but Paris, and had never found any enjoyment at La Treille except in the hunting season.

Elizabeth was older than her brothers ; her character was more fully developed, and her nature was higher and stronger than theirs. The repose, the freedom, the solitude of the country had always been among her chief pleasures. In crowded cities she shrank in upon herself, but her mind expanded freely in the woods ; her intellectual powers were strengthened, and the abstruse studies in which she delighted were less difficult to her at La Treille than in any other place. She felt that her life there was both happier and better than it could be in Paris, and she would have given a great deal, and sacrificed much, to have been able to keep La Treille, to carry out there that new life the burden of which she accepted not without a clear sense of its weight. But her nature was too strong and her judgment too sound to allow her to hesitate ; her brothers' education must be her first object ; and, as in Paris only could she carry out her plan of keeping them with her, and devoting herself to their service, Paris must be her home in summer as well as in winter. The sweet pleasures of country life were no longer possible ; and where things were impossible, they were to Elizabeth as if they did not exist. She accepted the

inevitable, not indeed without sorrow, yet without hesitation.

Marc saw that the sacrifice must be made, and he ceased to oppose Elizabeth's decision. The authority which her age naturally gave her over her brothers, and the liberty of speech which she claimed that she might use it for their service, concealed from their eyes the fact that her ascendancy over them was the result of superiority of character. They believed that they obeyed her because she was the eldest, and because she was free from those legal bonds by which they were hampered at each step they took, not because she was stronger, braver, and wiser than themselves.

And this, too, was Elizabeth's own belief. Little Henri loved to be near her ; he never left her side, and submitted to no other authority but hers, and she felt the love of a mother for him. She had great confidence in Marc's good affectionate nature ; but it was to Pierre, the most reserved, and the least easily influenced of her brothers, that she looked for help in carrying out her project.

He made a motion of assent.

' You are right,' he said slowly ; ' we have no choice. I promise, for my part, that I will do all in my power

to deliver you from the chains with which you have bound yourself.'

Marc, who considered himself as Elizabeth's protector in the new life which was about to open for them, looked at his brother with surprise, and little Henri silently embraced her.

'Do you not see,' said Pierre, laughing at their perplexed looks, and speaking with an air of superior wisdom, not unmixed with a touch of feeling, 'do you not see that Elizabeth is making arrangements which will render it impossible for her to marry?'

'I shall never marry,' said Elizabeth, smiling; and her voice was so firm, and there was such a look of determination in her large black eyes, that her brothers accepted her decision without a word of comment.

Older people would have smiled to have heard these four children thus arranging their lives, and deciding upon the future. Elizabeth delighted to picture herself as spending her days in silent and unknown acts of heroism. Pierre's thoughts were intent upon hard study, to be crowned by brilliant success; and Marc was already dreaming of battle-fields and the excitement of victory. Henri was still a child, and as yet he only cared to work in order to please Elizabeth; but if he

ever thought about the future at all, it was always in connection with that art which his mother had loved so dearly.

They had all four of them embarked together on a stormy sea; their sole possession one frail bark, and their only guide the strong will and the devotion of one young girl.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW LIFE.

HEY left La Treille, not without bitter regrets and many secret tears. Marc and Pierre were obliged to endure with what courage they could the visits of condolence and the leavetakings of their neighbours, many of them full of curiosity to learn the extent of the misfortune which had befallen the family.

Monsieur de Bauville, the well-known man of science, a member of the Institute, and a man of large fortune, was an object of pride, if not of affection, to the whole country, and his death had created a considerable sensation. It soon became known that he had suffered great pecuniary losses—that his death had, indeed, been caused by the loss of his fortune. Then darker rumours began to rise: it was said—and the report was one which Dr. Lebreton with all his influence found it very difficult to suppress—that Monsieur de

Bauville had committed suicide on discovering that he was a ruined man.

Before the necessary legal formalities had been completed for the sale of La Treille, the family council was appointed. Pierre smiled bitterly as he read over the list of names which had been sent to Elizabeth by their lawyer.

'How many of these people care anything about us?' he said.

Elizabeth shook her head. She did not expect much from any of them; but her belief in her own power to help herself was too strong to be shaken by the dread of being left friendless.

'When you are a celebrated engineer, and Marc has become a general, we shall have plenty of people to care for us; now we must be content to stand alone, and you must earn a place for yourself in the world.'

'We will earn a place for you at the same time,' said Marc; and Henri pressed affectionately to her side.

'Yes,' said Elizabeth, 'my place will be always with you, for I shall have no other home.'

In the old days when she had been most engrossed by her passion for scientific study, she had never dreamed of any personal fame; she had been content to let her rare powers be hidden in the seclusion of

her family ; but now when the cares of life pressed heavily upon her, she thought of those intellectual gifts that God had given her as a means of helping the education of her brothers, and of lessening the expenses of their college life, so that they might encroach as little as possible on the slender patrimony which would scarcely suffice to keep them all alive. Elizabeth was not much in the habit of reasoning about her duties, but she felt that a woman's proper place, even when her intellectual powers are of a high order, is at home ; that her gifts should be consecrated to the service of her family, and should be regarded by her as a means rather than as an end.

Marc and Pierre had at first been eager to return to Paris immediately. Their pride had been deeply wounded, and they hoped to forget their misfortunes in the whirl of business and pleasure of a great town more easily than in the quiet of the country, where they were the objects of so much idle gossip and curiosity.

But Elizabeth was unwilling to leave the old place. 'Give me a little time to collect my thoughts,' she said one day to Pierre, when he had been urging their departure.

Elizabeth never shed tears, and her brothers had not

noticed the dark circles round her eyes, the pale cheeks and tightly compressed lips which told of an internal struggle. But from this time Pierre ceased to speak of Paris, and restrained Marc's impatience as much as he could.

Elizabeth's pride and resolution were as great as ever; she knew what she had undertaken, and she did not shrink from the difficulties of her task; but she foresaw enough of care, trial, and struggle in the future to make her cling with mournful tenderness to this past life which was on the point of escaping from her. Every tree and stone of La Treille grew dearer to her as the time approached when she must leave it for ever. Wounded pride had no place in her thoughts; they were occupied with higher things. She never believed that change of fortune could alter anyone's estimation of her family, and the solitude in which they were left, far from vexing her as it did her brothers, seemed to her a matter for congratulation.

'How glad I am that I have no visits to pay!' she said. 'Marc has seen the husbands, but the wives have not troubled themselves to come, and I am so busy that I should never have had time to receive them.'

If as she went about the house she sometimes caught

Marianne or Thomas looking at her compassionately, she thought they were pitying her for the loss of her parents, not for the change in their circumstances.

'They know what a sad thing it is to be an orphan,' she said to herself; and yet the poor child had never known the tenderness of a father's love.

At length everything was settled ; part of the simple furniture of La Treille was sent to Paris ; the rest was to be sold along with the handsome furniture, the rich ornaments, and treasures of art with which their *appartement* in the Rue de Grenade had been decorated. The lawyer to whom the settlement of their affairs had been entrusted by the family council found that the remnant of their fortune would produce an income of six thousand francs. Upon this the four orphans must live and the boys' education be carried on.

Elizabeth was not entirely ignorant of the value of money, and she thought she knew the extent to which their means had been diminished, but she soon found that she had not calculated correctly. It was necessary to provide a lodging, consisting of three bedrooms, a small sitting-room, a kitchen, and a closet for Marianne, who absolutely refused to leave 'her children.'

Marc and Pierre returned to college as boarders until Christmas, for the half-yearly fees had been paid

in advance; and, as Marc said, ‘Since the haricot beans and the bad sour wine had been paid for, they had better be consumed.’

Henri for the present remained with his sister. They occupied a small corner of the suite of rooms, now strip of their fine furniture, in which they had lived six months ago with their father and mother.

That time seemed very far off to Elizabeth as she prosecuted her search through the streets of the Faubourg St. Jacques in the hope of finding a lodging to suit her near the Lyceum of Louis le Grand. What a weary search she found it! From how many houses did she turn away at the threshold, afraid even to enter them, and how her hopes sank at sight of those she ventured to examine! How much she learnt of the increasing luxury of the inhabitants of Paris, and of the struggles of poverty! How it grieved her to think of giving pain to Marianne, who had been accustomed for so many years to the comfort of her master’s house!

It was not without great difficulty that Elizabeth settled the details of her expenditure; but after many consultations with the old housekeeper she came to the conclusion that when she had put aside a certain sum for food, clothes, and some small things which it would

be necessary to keep in reserve for unforeseen emergencies, there would remain only a thousand francs for rent. Alas ! all the lodgings that were at all tolerable exceeded Elizabeth's resources. Her requirements had been modest enough to begin with, but she was obliged to diminish them still further.

'I shall be obliged to look out for a porter's lodge at last,' she said to Henri one morning as she was tying on her bonnet before starting on her daily quest. 'I saw one yesterday that would suit us beautifully ; it was at a new house, and as fine as a drawing-room—all lighted with gas. To be sure we should have been obliged all four to scramble into a loft.'

'What is a loft?' said Henri with a look of disgust.

The boy's delicate constitution, frail health, and refined tastes often troubled Elizabeth and augmented the difficulties of her task. She had rejected more than one set of rooms that might possibly have been made to suit them from fear of the effect they would have had upon Henri.

'It is a kind of closet,' she answered, laughing at his look of disgust, 'into which one mounts by means of a ladder.'

'Like the place where Marianne used to keep her best china?' said the child with even greater horror.

'Exactly,' said Elizabeth, who was by this time at the head of the stairs; 'only we should have to get rid of the dust.' And she reached the street door before the poor child had recovered from his surprise.

For more than three hours she had been engaged in her weary search when she discovered a bill of lodgings to let, which she had not seen before.

'I thought I knew all the bills,' she said to Marianne, who was following her slowly and sadly, and often grumbling; 'but look there, high up in the fifth flat I see a bill in the window.'

'In that old house!' exclaimed Marianne. 'Why, it would tumble down about our ears!'

Elizabeth, however, knocked at the door, and they were at once admitted by the porter.

The house was old, certainly, but it had been a good house in its day; the staircase was broad, and still boasted of handsome iron balustrades. The numerous doors opening from each landing each one bore a different name, as if the house had been filled with a crowd of inmates of many occupations, and many grades of life.

Elizabeth continued to ascend, listening as she went to the talk of the woman who took care of the rooms.

'A poor young man had taken these lodgings—a

young artisan, who was as good and innocent as a girl ; he was going to be married, and his mother and sister-in-law were to have lived with the young people ; that was why he had taken such good rooms. For more than a month past he had been getting them done up, and he often came himself of an evening to work in them ; he had them newly papered, the cupboards all put in order, the keys made to fit the locks, and the doors and windows all made to shut to perfection. It is a gem of a lodging, as you will see. But all of a sudden the poor little girl died, of small-pox, they say, and she was buried four days ago ; so there was an end of wedding and room letting. That is the reason I put up the bill this morning. True, it is all the better for me, for he took so much trouble about them ; and it is a fine chance for you if you take them, for you will find everything arranged to suit a bride.'

And the old woman looked inquisitively at Elizabeth, as if she would like to ask her if she were about to settle; but her grave demeanour saved her from impertinent questions.

When she left the little home that the poor mechanic had prepared for his wife she had decided to take it. The next day the lease was drawn out and signed

by Mademoiselle Elisabeth Marie Louise de Bauville, in presence of the lawyer, whose good opinion she had gained by her resolution and frankness, and by the soundness of her judgment.

‘Poor child !’ he sighed, as he wiped his pen ; ‘what changes and troubles are before her !’

CHAPTER XIV.

CALM.

LIZABETH, however, did not agree with the lawyer; she believed that her worst troubles were over, and the little domicile seemed to her like a haven of rest. They had some difficulty in packing all the furniture that they had brought from La Treille into the tiny rooms. The piano which Elizabeth had kept in memory of her mother and to amuse Henri, the round table which served them for meals, the couch on which Henri rested when he came in from his classes, crowded the little sitting-room which had been destined to receive the scanty furniture of the young mechanic. But Elizabeth tried the things first in one position and then in another, and altered and re-altered everything, till at last she succeeded in satisfying herself. Though she had not inherited her mother's artistic feeling, which had descended to Henri, she possessed an instinctive love of order,

which taught her to make the most of their slender resources.

Of the elegance of their former life no trace now remained except the quiet simplicity and the exquisite cleanliness that Marianne carried with her wherever she went. The two young collegians were inclined to be very contemptuous when they saw the little rooms for the first time; but when they came to exchange the chill dormitories of the college, and the halls blackened by twenty generations of scholars, for these neat apartments so carefully prepared for them by Elizabeth, they felt how pleasant it was to be in a home of their own again, after the comfortless life they had been leading for many months.

The profound isolation of their present life was no hardship to Elizabeth, for it drew the brothers and sister more closely together. Under the influence of the loving intercourse that was established between them both Pierre's reserve and Marc's carelessness almost disappeared.

Elizabeth was happy at last.

'This is the life of which I have dreamed,' she said to herself, when at the close of a hard day's work she seated herself with her brothers round the table, which she had just cleared after their simple repast.

Marc and Pierre were working in silence ; Henri, perched on a chair close to his sister, sometimes even climbing into her lap, applied to her in whispers when he wanted a difficulty explained, or repeated his lessons for the next day.

' If we can all keep well, and if the boys do not grow too fast, so as to wear out their clothes, I think we may contrive to live on what we have without help from anybody.'

She was often urged by the lawyers, whom she had occasionally to see on business, to apply for help to certain members of the family, but she was too proud to follow their advice.

' You are very young to support such a burden alone,' one of the notaries who had known Elizabeth from her childhood once said to her. ' It is not an easy thing to manage boys ; it would be very desirable for you to have the advice of some of your relations——'

' My brothers can manage their own education,' she replied, drawing herself up ; ' Marc and Pierre are men now, and Henri is as gentle as a lamb.'

' Men ?' said the notary, smiling ; ' Monsieur Marc is —— ?'

' Seventeen,' replied Elizabeth, blushing slightly.

' And Monsieur Pierre ?'

'Fifteen. My mother lost two girls between my birth and Marc's.'

The lawyer said no more. What would they have done, he thought, if there had been two more to share the remnant of their fortune!

'If my sisters had only lived!' was Elizabeth's thought.

Certain of these friends of the family, for whom Marc and Pierre entertained mingled feelings of fear and contempt, had thought it their duty to go and see the orphans on their arrival in Paris. They had proposed various expedients to Elizabeth, who was the only one in a position to act independently.

'Your three brothers might be placed as boarders in a Lyceum,' they said; 'it would not be difficult to obtain an exhibition for one of them. And for yourself the best plan would be that you should board with some elderly lady—some friend of the family—who would take the place of your mother and look after you; you are too young to live alone.'

Elizabeth listened for a time in silence.

'And where should I find this friend of my family who is to act as my protector?' she quietly asked at length.

Her visitors looked at each other. One of them was

a distant cousin of her own, a rich man, absorbed in his own affairs, whose wife and daughters would have been dismayed at the bare idea of receiving into their house such a girl as Elizabeth de Bauville, with her black dress, her grand air and her poverty.

The other was an old mathematician, a humble client of Monsieur de Bauville's, without either family, or fortune, who had accepted the invitation to become a member of the family council, as he accepted all other duties that presented themselves in his path, and who had accompanied the cousin on this visit to Elizabeth without any very clear idea as to what he was expected to do.

'You do not know anyone who would be willing to receive me, do you?' continued Elizabeth, in the same calm tone. 'I am not free from encumbrance too; my youngest brother could not leave me; his health is so delicate that he needs my constant care. And I have also with me my father's old housekeeper, who would die of grief if she were parted from us. My two eldest brothers,'—and Elizabeth raised her head proudly, as she enumerated all the treasures she still possessed,—'My two eldest brothers will work much better, I think, if we all live together, than if they were to live alone at college. We do not mean to ask for any help from

government ; we hope to live upon what we have.' And she rose as if to terminate the interview.

The cousin took up his hat.

' I only wished to give you a piece of advice,' he said, dryly.

Elizabeth bowed gravely. ' I am extremely obliged to you, but our arrangements are all made. My brothers have returned to the Lyceum a week ago, and their guardian, the kind-hearted notary, approves of all we have done.'

Her visitor found himself considerably embarrassed. ' If Monsieur Trémiot approves of your arrangements I have nothing more to say. You must excuse my wife and daughters for not having yet called upon you—but we live a long way from here—they are so much occupied ——'

' And I am too much occupied to be able to visit them,' interrupted Elizabeth ; and as she spoke she bowed again, with as stately an air as if she had been a princess.

She had adopted this old-fashioned mode of bowing by Monsieur de Bauville's desire, who had always preserved an affectionate remembrance of it in his mother, and who disliked the pert familiar nod in use among the modern young ladies of his day.

'Can you not take the trouble to learn how to make a bow?' he used to say.

The bow completed the poor cousin's discomfiture; he made his escape without uttering another word; and the old mathematician followed his example, muttering something to himself as he disappeared.

'Monsieur Saveleye seems to be working a problem,' said Elizabeth, laughing, as she closed the door of the sitting-room behind her visitors.

What the old man murmured to himself was this: 'I will write to Monsieur Delahais at Les Forges de Césay; I used to meet him long ago at his sister's house. He is the only person who could do any good here. I will write to him,—I will write to him tomorrow!'

Their solitude, however, continued undisturbed. The occasional writing of a business letter, the receipt of the monthly accounts for the two students, addressed to their guardian and sent by him to their sister, the signing of her name now and then to a receipt or a legal paper,—these were the rare events of Elizabeth's life. Her brothers found variety and excitement enough in their college life. The successive examinations, the chances of success or failure, the interest of the work itself, filled their thoughts and their time.

Marc was no longer idle, for he felt the necessity of making a great effort. Pierre had always worked hard ; he was ambitious, and he really loved study. Henri's intelligence, docility, and affectionate nature satisfied Elizabeth's dearest hopes, and she kept him steadily to his work.

'I wish you would sometimes let me off my lessons,' he said laughingly, when he wanted to tease his sister.

'I would if you were ill,' she answered ; 'but when you are only idle I could not let you off myself, and so how could I ask the professor to do so ?'

'One must be always working to satisfy you,' he said, returning to his books.

Elizabeth's time was fully occupied ; but her active mind found no sufficient occupation in her daily tasks. Often as she sat mending stockings, or while she prepared the dinner, or made the beds, or dusted the furniture, her thoughts wandered to her favourite study, and she would soon become deeply engaged in working out some mathematical problem. She went about her domestic duties with the most minute regularity, arranging a room as if she were classifying figures, but her thoughts were elsewhere. One day she laughed aloud to herself as she discovered that she had swept

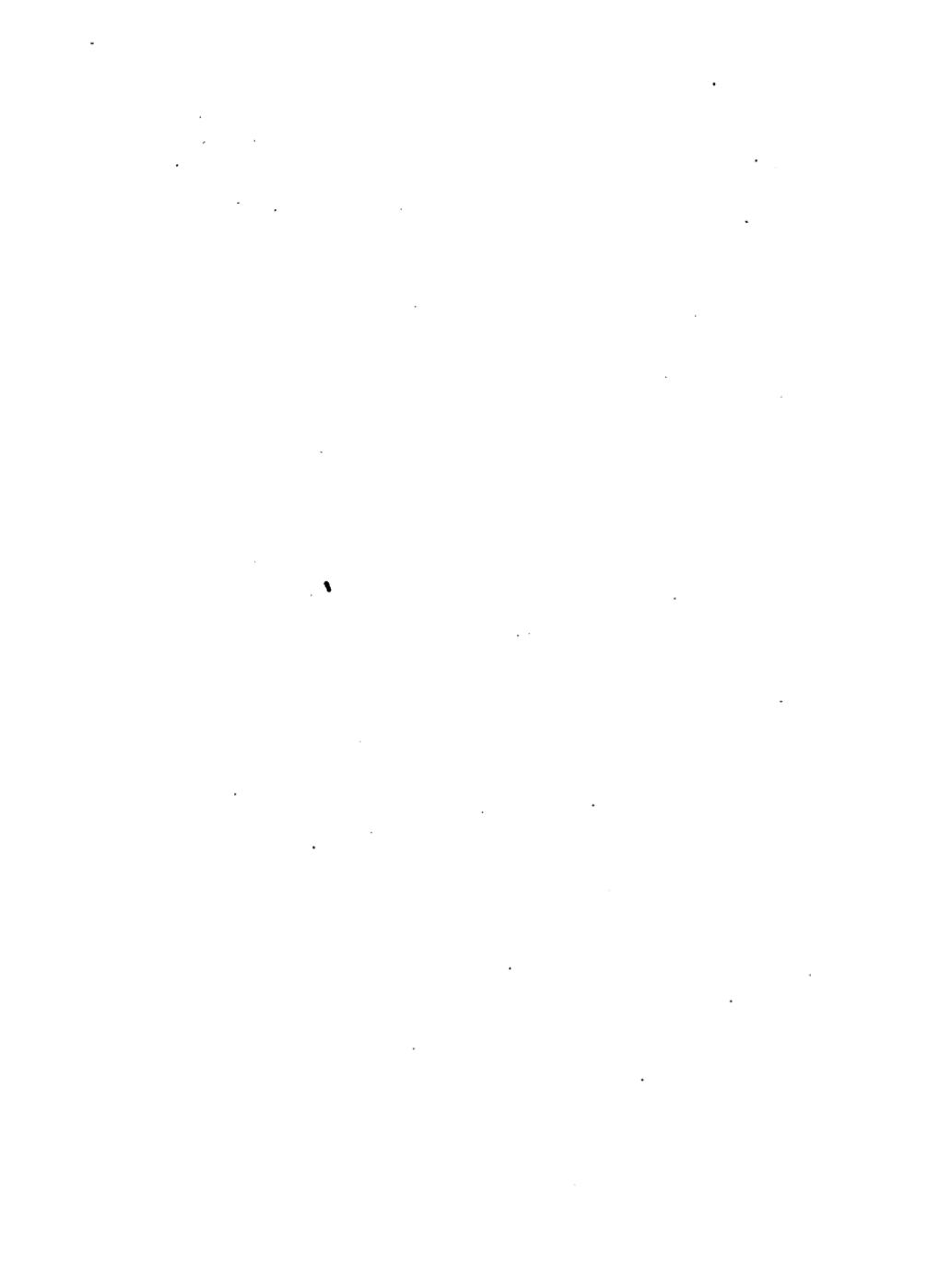
the little sitting-room twice over, so absorbed had she been in a difficult calculation.

This double strain of household cares and intellectual work kept Elizabeth pale and thin ; but she was strong, and the little attentions which she lavished on her brothers, the constant stir which their presence produced in the house, and the cheerful conversation that always accompanied their meals, gave her mind relaxation.

If she gave herself up to her favourite study as she went about her household work, it was not possible to do so while she was giving Henri a dictation, or hearing him his lessons, or looking up words for him in the dictionary. In the evenings, too, she had undertaken to help Marc, who had now begun to prepare seriously for his examination at St. Cyr, and who, poor boy, was greatly in need of encouragement.

'It is no use !' he often cried in despair ; 'I shall never understand the questions. While I am making out one I forget all the others ! I know I shall not pass, and then there will be nothing for it but to enlist.'

'In order that you may have a second examination to go through ?' said Elizabeth, ironically. She could not admit the possibility of failure, or understand how anyone could give up striving.



[To face p. 109



BLUNDERING MARC

'Never fear! I should learn the business of a soldier fast enough! Trust me to know how to get my head broken!'

'Do not say that, Marc,' said Henri.

Pierre only shrugged his shoulders.

'We had better go on with our work,' said Elizabeth, quietly. And she patiently resumed her questions and explanations, always taking care to conceal from her brother the astonishment she felt at his dulness of comprehension.

'I should never have the patience to correct you when you make the same mistake ten times over,' exclaimed Pierre one night, when he had been more than usually disturbed in his work by Marc's blunders.

'I should never ask you to take the trouble,' said the eldest brother. 'Before long it will be your own turn to prepare for examination.'

Pierre smiled scornfully.

'Elizabeth shall never have any trouble with me,' he muttered.

Elizabeth was ready to devote herself equally to them all; but perhaps in her heart she felt less tenderness for Pierre than for the other two. She felt that of them all Pierre was the one who had the least need of her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST CLOUDS.

HE peace that reigned in the little home in which the orphans had established themselves was not destined to last long. Elizabeth would have been content to work on without ever resting on her oars, if only she could have sailed on a quiet sea; but a storm was already gathering in the distance.

One day Marc came home from college with a gloomy face, and lips tightly pressed together. He had not spoken to Pierre as they left the Lyceum, and the two brothers had come home by different roads. Henri, who as usual accompanied Marc, ran to Elizabeth as soon as Marianne opened the door.

'I cannot think what is the matter with Marc,' he whispered, hurriedly, 'but he is in a dreadful temper!'

At the same moment Marc entered the room, threw down his books, and flung himself into a chair.

'The Head-master tells me that if I wish to pass my examination, it will be absolutely necessary for me to go to a preparatory school,' he exclaimed.

Elizabeth started. 'We cannot afford it,' she said, almost involuntarily.

'I know that,' said Marc, rising and walking up and down the room in great excitement. 'I shall not pass; that follows as a matter of course; indeed, he almost said as much.'

'Everybody goes to preparatory schools,' said Pierre, who had just come in. 'That is no proof that he thinks you more stupid than other people.'

'It is a proof that I must go to one if I hope to pass,' maintained Marc; 'and as that is impossible
—'

Pierre laid his hand on Elizabeth's shoulder. 'If you take him in hand, I will answer for your success, in spite of what the professor says.'

Elizabeth blushed deeply; Pierre's good opinion was very dear to her, and he was not much in the habit of expressing it. She turned cheerfully to Marc; 'Since our brother Pierre thinks that between us we can manage to get you through St. Cyr, it only remains for us to justify his good opinion.' And, as she spoke, she drew towards her brother the scientific books with which the table was covered.

Marc placed himself at the table, but his face was still as gloomy as ever.

'I shall fail for want of a little money,' he exclaimed; 'for want of a miserable six months' board at a good preparatory school my prospects in life will be ruined. And all because my father suffered himself to be robbed by a swindler,—because he thought of nothing but his books instead of looking after the welfare of his children!' And he struck the table with his hand in a fit of impotent passion.

Elizabeth forced herself to keep silence. She was not naturally forbearing, and her inclination was to judge severely; but experience had taught her the wisdom of restraining bitter words when they came to her lips.

Pierre, who was trying to read, only shrugged his shoulders; but Henri could not keep quiet. With his face all flushed with indignation, he threw himself upon Marc as if he would have beaten him.

'How can you say that of papa?' he cried. 'Surely he had a right to occupy himself as he chose? It was because he was so good that he never thought any one could rob him. It is cowardly to reproach him now—'

'Now that he is dead,' said Elizabeth, gravely, as

she drew the child into her arms, and tried by tender caresses to calm his agitation.

Marc looked a little ashamed, and turned to his books.

Henri, sitting on his sister's knee, whispered in her ear, 'Do you remember how he gathered the dry leaves for us, not more than a week before—— and how he laughed when the fire was kindled? We were very happy then—he was so good!'

The poor child's tears began to flow fast; he was so affectionate and tender-hearted that he had forgotten everything except those rare occasions when his father had been kind to them.

Elizabeth had forgotten nothing, but in her memory her father's virtues held a place as well as his faults. And she was very proud of him, proud of his high reputation as a man of science, and of that pure love of learning which she felt that she had in some degree inherited from him. With her natural reserve, she had no difficulty in understanding and sympathising with the love of retirement which had been so strong in him. Marc, on the contrary, who was in nothing like his father, could not comprehend a character so different from his own; and as for Pierre, what he understood he was unable to forgive.

The two brothers continued their work in silence,

while Elizabeth carried Henri out of the room and put him to bed, for she still treated him like a child, on account of his extreme delicacy. When she returned, Marc stooped towards her as she was about to begin her usual examination.

‘Is Henri asleep?’ he asked, abruptly.

‘Not yet.’

‘I am very sorry that I made him cry,’ he murmured.

Elizabeth answered him only with a kind look; but she redoubled her efforts to help him in his work.

‘My good Marc!’ she said to herself.

But alas! all her endeavours could not make up for her brother’s want of energy. Worn out by the effort he had been making to work at a subject for which he had no taste, this unfortunate advice of the Head-master furnished him with an excuse for idleness at the same time that it increased his depression. When Elizabeth pressed him to work, when she reminded him of the weeks that were gone, and counted up those that remained before the examination, he answered her impatiently or sank into gloom, insisting that it would be of no use for him to try.

‘It is impossible for me to succeed; how should I? I have had no special preparation like the others. No! beggars must never hope to enter St. Cyr!’

Elizabeth's patience broke down at that word.

'We are poor, no doubt, but we are no more beggars than is M. de Rothschild in his palace. From whom have we ever asked anything? There is not a creature under the sun to whom we owe a farthing, or to whom we are indebted for a favour. And as for this examination, which I could pass this moment without ever opening a book,' and she pushed aside the volumes which lay before her on the table; 'you ought to be ashamed even to admit the possibility of failure! Think of a Bauville rejected at St. Cyr! A son of my father failing to pass an examination in the theory of arithmetic!'

She stopped suddenly, her voice trembling with anger and contempt; her eyes flashed, and she looked so erect and resolute that Marc hung his head in confusion, and, to his own astonishment, made no attempt to reply.

But Elizabeth had struck a fatal blow to her influence over him by thus allowing him to see for a single instant the contempt for his powers, which she had hitherto taken such pains to conceal. The young man felt himself humbled by the intellectual superiority of his sister. Explain them away as he might, he was deeply wounded by the hard words with which she

had overwhelmed him. If he still accepted her help, it was with an air of defiance, as if he protested against making any serious effort, and it became more and more clear to Elizabeth every day that the object for which she was striving so earnestly would never be attained. Marc was not only careless and idle, he was becoming reckless and morose. He began to avoid her, staying out late at night and leaving home very early in the morning, and he either did no work at all or he worked badly. The poor girl often bitterly reproached herself for her fit of anger.

'What do you say, Pierre?' she suddenly asked her younger brother one day, as they sat together waiting dinner for Marc; 'do you think that by giving up everything but what is absolutely necessary it would be possible for us to pay for Marc's board at St. Barbière?'

'What could we give up?' asked Pierre, who thought that their life in the little lodging was sufficiently bare already.

'We could keep ourselves alive, you know, if we ate only bread and potatoes.'

'And do you think that would do for Henri also?'

Elizabeth hesitated.

'You would deprive yourself of everything for Marc's sake, and we cannot prevent his failure. He has taken

it into his head to do nothing, which is always very pleasant to him, and all the preparatory schools in the world would do him no good. He is only eighteen; when he has failed at this examination he must begin over again; he will have had a lesson by that time.'

Elizabeth coloured violently.

'Do you mean to make arrangements, also, for your own failure in your first examination?' she asked, dryly.

'I?' said Pierre, laughing. 'Oh, that is a different thing. I mean to work.'

Elizabeth could say nothing more; all her efforts and prayers were useless; she could not *force* Marc to work.

CHAPTER XVI.

IMPOTENCE.

HE feeling of helplessness is very trying to strong natures. Elizabeth, young as she was, had always been in the habit of exerting her will, and of applying her energy to difficult tasks ; she had now for more than a year been carrying on a struggle against poverty, as she had done formerly against sorrow and loneliness ; and she knew by experience that she was not without strength to fight and conquer. But here, for the first time, she found herself face to face with a difficulty that she could not surmount, and her helplessness both irritated and mortified her. She had, it is true, seen her father and mother struck down by death, and her love had been powerless to save them ; but then the blow had come directly from the hand of God, and Elizabeth bowed to His decree. Though she had not then learned to know or love God, yet she had too

much rectitude and elevation of nature to resist the will of the Most High.

But Marc's idleness was not the work of God, who had given him fair abilities. Good and evil were presented before the young man's eyes, and he was free to choose between them ; on the one hand lay assiduous work, a virtuous life, a laborious but honourable career on the other a shameful and miserable existence, full of failure, humiliation, and ruin. And it was to this side that Marc seemed leaning. All his sister's warnings and reproaches were useless ; their only effect appeared to be to hurry him forward in his evil choice.

Elizabeth suffered cruel anxiety. Unlike most women, she could find no relief in tears ; but very often, when the whole household were asleep, when her eldest brother was resting tranquilly after an ill-spent day, the poor girl passed the night seated on her bed or walking slowly up and down her room, turning over in her mind all her causes of apprehension, and weighing again and again all the chances of success or failure, her thoughts always returning to the same point from which she started. ‘Oh, Marc ! Marc !’ she often said aloud, ‘how can you be so foolish and so idle ?’

It was at this time, when the brave girl began to feel her own powerlessness, that she learnt also the

first rudiments of a knowledge higher than any that her cherished studies had taught her; she learnt for the first time her dependence upon God. She had gone through all her former trials without doubting herself or losing anything of her natural pride, but now she felt how weak she was, how incapable of influencing this human soul, and she carried her trouble with simple confidence to the Sovereign Master of all hearts.

Her brother whom she loved so dearly was about to sacrifice his own future and that of his family to present enjoyment, and she had no power to avert the danger. She could not help seeing that such influence as she once had over Marc was slipping from her; and she felt that he was neither strong enough nor wise enough to direct his own steps. Instead of struggling against the bitter sense of her weakness, instead of repeating useless efforts to obtain Marc's confidence and to induce him to work as he ought to do at this critical moment, she turned her thoughts in prayer to God whom she had hitherto neglected. What sorrow and poverty had failed to accomplish was now effected in her heart by wounded family affection, and she learned to pray for Marc before she knew how to pray for herself. The thought that she might look upon God as her father filled her mind with such profound peace that she felt

herself gently drawn on to approach more nearly to Him every day.

Before long, too, she was called upon for a further sacrifice of her pride and independence ; she had to learn the need of human beings to lean on one another. By degrees it became evident not only that Marc was not working, but that he misspent the time which he took from study. In the arrangement of their household expenses scarcely anything had been reserved for pleasure or ornament : Elizabeth, although in free possession of her fifteen hundred francs, felt that she could not venture to buy herself a piece of ribbon or even an unnecessary sheet of paper. The three younger ones, who were still under the care of their guardian, had at their disposal only a small sum, not more than sufficient to buy pens and copybooks ; and yet Elizabeth knew that Marc occasionally bought himself new pieces of dress, and she constantly found ends of cigars lying about his room. Several times lately he had come home very late at night, and his sister discovered with dismay that many volumes of books had disappeared from the shelves.

Elizabeth was overwhelmed at this discovery ; she blushed with shame at the thought of acting as a spy upon Marc, yet how could she help watching him ?

In her ignorance of evil the thought of the unknown dangers that threatened her brother haunted her night and day ; but brave as she was she could not venture to open her lips to him on the subject of her fears. Marc, moreover, carefully avoided every occasion of being alone with her : a very easy matter in their little household, where the four young people were obliged to sit constantly together in their only sitting room, sharing the light of a single lamp, and the warmth of their only fire.

Every evening as soon as he had hurried through his mathematical preparations and answered, almost at random, any questions as to his progress that Elizabeth as a matter of conscience still put to him, it was his custom to retire to his own room. Elizabeth might have protested against the extravagance of burning an additional light, but she knew too well that his candle would be very soon extinguished. He could not hide his movements from Marianne, who never failed to tell her mistress all she knew ; and it was no unusual thing for the old servant to report, ‘It was two o’clock this morning when the porter opened the door for Monsieur Marc.’

Did Pierre know where his brother went ? They shared the same room, and left college at the same

hour. When Pierre went out in the evening, which did not happen very often, for he worked with indefatigable zeal, he was not in the habit of mentioning any more than Marc where he was going; and Elizabeth had such perfect confidence in him that she never thought of asking him a question. The reserve natural to both brother and sister made it impossible for them to open their hearts to each other on such a subject; Elizabeth had never spoken to Pierre of her anxiety on Marc's account, and he, if he shared it, kept his fears to himself.

Yet she saw that something must be done quickly, and before long she made up her mind what step to take. She knew that it would be no use to speak to her brother's guardian; the good notary was too much occupied, and he had from the first declared that he would confine his supervision of his wards strictly to the management of their money matters. 'All the rest Mademoiselle de Bauville will do much better than I could,' he had said to the three boys.

And up to this time Mademoiselle de Bauville had thought so too. If she had now lost confidence in herself, at least she had not committed the mistake of expecting too much from Monsieur Trémiont.

She came to the resolution that she would write to

her uncle, Monsieur Delahais. In spite of the bitter feeling that had existed between him and her father, in spite of the indifference which he had shown to the fate of his sister's children, Elizabeth allowed her affection and anxiety for Marc to decide her at last to apply to him for help, as the only relation she had left in the world.

She wrote very simply, telling him their position, with a frankness and almost sternness that betrayed at every word the extremity of her need for help. She was still writing late at night, sitting with a shawl wrapped round her beside the half-extinguished fire; her letter was almost finished, the envelope, ready addressed, lay before her on the table, and yet she still hesitated whether she should send it. As she sat undecided she was startled at hearing a key softly inserted into the lock; a faint light appeared for a moment under the door, and a stealthy step sounded in the passage. It was Marc coming home at half-past twelve o'clock. Her hesitation lasted no longer; adding a few lines to her letter, she folded it and put it into the envelope. At eight o'clock the next morning the important epistle was posted, and Elizabeth had renounced for ever the absolute freedom of action which up to this time she had prized so highly.

CHAPTER XVII.

A VISITOR.



FORTNIGHT passed and no answer came to Elizabeth's letter. Her pride which had been crushed for a time again took possession of her; she was deeply hurt, and yet with her vexation was mingled a secret feeling of relief. 'I have done all I could,' she thought; 'if no one comes to help us, we must manage matters by ourselves.'

Meantime things were growing worse every day. Marc scarcely studied at all; and when the quarterly reports were sent in from the college the amount of work done by him presented so great a contrast to that done by his brother that the old guardian noticed it, and in forwarding them to Elizabeth he called her attention significantly to the state of Marc's report.

Poor Elizabeth! Marc's work was her constant thought, her only trouble. Henri was getting stronger,

and he worked so diligently and was so good and gentle that he was like a younger sister to her in the house, introducing an element of brightness into their life, and softening the colder and more reserved intercourse subsisting amongst the older ones. Pierre was steady, determined, hard-working. He was not a favourite with his companions, but the professors never had a fault to find with him, and he took the highest place in every examination. But Marc ! Elizabeth felt a tightness at her heart whenever she thought of him, and she thought of him all day long. She prayed for him also without ceasing ; she felt truly that what Marc most wanted was a fixed principle powerful enough to triumph over his natural indolence and carelessness. ‘If he had but learnt to love God,’ she said to herself.

It was by praying to God to help her brother that she had herself learned to love Him.

One day she was sitting alone in their little drawing-room ; it was late in the afternoon, and all the boys were at college. She had finished her household work, and was resting beside the open window, for it was spring-time, with a large basketful of socks and stockings on the ground at her feet. Her attention was not all given to her needlework ; sometimes she took up a paper which lay on her lap, and wrote down a figure

or an algebraical sign. For Elizabeth had found out that the mending of stockings and the study of mathematics agreed wonderfully well together.

'It is quite a different thing when one has to mend a coat or a shirt,' she said; 'that needs intellect; but in taking up one after another these broken stitches one can very well work out the parts of a problem, for they also hang upon one another; so the needle-work and the calculation go on together!'

At this moment the house-bell rang. Marianne had gone out, and Elizabeth rose to open the door herself, a little surprised that anyone should ring at so unusual an hour. With the exception of the boys when they came in from college at eleven and half-past four, and the tradespeople who called in the morning, the house-bell was not rung once in a week.

She opened the door, and a tall, thin, grave-looking man of about twenty-eight or thirty presented himself before her.

'You have made some mistake, I think,' she said, without offering to admit him. 'I have not the honour of knowing you.'

'I am speaking to Mademoiselle de Bauville, am I not?' enquired the visitor, not at all disconcerted.

Elizabeth bowed.

'I am René Surbach.'

Elizabeth looked as much puzzled as before.

'The step-son of Monsieur Delahais,' he added, with a touch of impatience.

Bowing slightly, she stepped aside to allow Monsieur Surbach to enter.

Why had her uncle sent this step-son, of whom she had never even heard, instead of coming himself? she thought. The journey could be no difficulty to him, for he was very rich.

The visitor did not seem more inclined to speak than Elizabeth herself. He took a letter from his pocket-book, and handed it to her in silence, and while she read it he walked to the window, and appeared absorbed in the contemplation of the roofs, chimneys, and narrow streets of which their prospect was composed.

Elizabeth remained standing while she read her letter.

'My dear niece,' wrote Monsieur Delahais; 'I am old and infirm, and I am afraid I have grown selfish into the bargain. When your friend, Monsieur Saveleye, wrote to me—I am ashamed to think how long ago—I hoped to be able to come to Paris and see you. But time has passed and my gout has never loosened its hold on me. When your letter arrived both my

hands were disabled by it, so that I could not write in reply ; now it has attacked my feet, and I must give up all hope of being able to come to you. I send my step-son, René Surbach, the son of my second wife ; he has promised to see you and your brothers, and René is always better than his word. He knows what you have written to me, and I think he is more fit to help you than I am ; at least it is not so long since he was a young man himself ; though I have not forgotten my own young days either. You must come and see me this summer, that we may become acquainted. I loved your mother dearly, and before her marriage she returned my affection. I wonder if you are like her ? But René will tell me all about that.'

Elizabeth's colour rose more than once as she read this letter ; first on learning that an appeal had been made to her uncle on her behalf before her own letter had been written. ('Poor Monsieur Saveleye !' she thought ; 'he pitied us !') And a second time when she found that Monsieur Surbach, that grave, resolute-looking man, was already aware of Marc's wrong-doing and her own want of influence over him.

Her good-will towards her visitor was certainly not

increased by the contents of the letter. She was angry with her uncle for having the gout, angry with René Surbach for coming to Paris, and angry with herself for having lifted the veil under which her domestic troubles and difficulties had been concealed. It was, therefore, in no gentle mood that she turned towards Monsieur Surbach, who had not turned from his position at the window.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, coldly. 'My uncle's letter is a long one, and his handwriting is not familiar to me.'

René repressed a smile. In spite of his grave exterior he had a quick sense of the ridiculous, and from this opening of the conversation he expected a passage at arms. He had come to Paris and undertaken the mission confided to him by Monsieur Delahais with a very natural distrust of the extraordinary talents and acquirements of Elizabeth, on which subject Monsieur Saveleye had descanted at great length in his letter.

'It is said that she is as well able to prepare her brothers for their examinations as any professor of a college,' he had written.

And here was this learned lady, devoted to studies not thought fit for women, reduced to confess herself vanquished; her brothers had broken away from her

control—which was not at all to be wondered at, thought Monsieur Surbach.

He had found it very difficult to leave the iron-works, of which he was joint manager with Monsieur Delahais, at a time, too, when his step-father was too ill to look after them himself; but he felt it was right that Monsieur Delahais should do what he could to help his niece, and, since he was unable to go to her in person, the young man had consented to go in his stead.

As she spoke he turned to look at her, and his preconceived ideas about her were rather thrown into confusion when he saw how simple she looked in spite of her reserved manners, and noticed the neatness and orderliness of the little room.

‘Until now I had not even the honour of knowing your name,’ continued Elizabeth, a little piqued at her visitor’s silence.

René made her a deep bow.

‘Fifteen years ago,’ he said, ‘when all communication between your mother and Monsieur Delahais was broken off, your uncle, after having been a widower for a long time, married my mother, who was a widow. We then left Alsace, where my father had been a manufacturer.

I was brought up by Monsieur Delahais, and I am now in partnership with him.'

'Now I know all about you,' said Elizabeth, beginning to smile. 'May I ask you if my uncle has any children? I am quite ignorant of everything concerning him,' she added, a little sadly.

'I am his adopted son,' said René, simply; 'he has no other child.'

'Then, cousin,' rejoined Elizabeth, though without dropping her reserve in addressing him by that title, 'you are no doubt very much occupied in your iron works?'

'Very much occupied; but I manage to get away sometimes,' said René, who was not quite so anxious to end the conversation as he had been a few minutes ago.

At this moment the house-bell rang.

'There are my brothers,' she said, as she rose to answer it.

Alas! as usual Marc was not with them. Pierre came first, and Henri, who walked more slowly, arrived a few minutes after him.

Elizabeth introduced them to her visitor, telling them in a few words who he was.

'Your eldest brother is not here?' enquired Monsieur Surbach, looking towards the door.

Elizabeth and Pierre both blushed.

'He will be here presently, I think,' said Pierre.

'Let us go and meet him, then, and you can introduce us to one another.' And René rose up to take leave of Elizabeth.

Pierre hardly knew what to say; but he was gifted with tact; he saw at once that the interview had lasted long enough, and that the ice had not been broken in the *tête-à-tête* between his sister and René.

'I do not think we should meet him,' he said; 'but I am not sure; we can try.'

And he followed Monsieur Surbach, who had by this time left the room. He was evidently a man accustomed to set to work at once in whatever he undertook to do.

'Well,' thought Pierre, 'if we do not meet Marc, I shall at any rate have time to tell him something of the state of matters here. It is bad enough already, but with all her anxiety Elizabeth does not know what we shall come to soon.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND.

MONSIEUR SURBACH got on better with Pierre than he had done with Elizabeth. The young scholar did not allow his reserve to overcome his frankness. Without asking direct questions René Surbach showed such an evident interest in the young people, and such a strong wish to be of use to them for his father's sake, that Pierre was encouraged to speak openly to him on the subject of their anxiety for Marc. The knowledge of the world and of men, for which Pierre gave his companion credit, made it more easy for the boy to disclose the extremities to which his brother had been reduced. By the time they had finished their walk René Surbach knew a great deal about Marc. He learnt how he was neglecting his work while he professed to be preparing for his examination. Pierre

spoke also of the existence of many small debts which placed his brother in a very unpleasant position with his companions, from whom he had borrowed money.

'And how does he intend to repay these sums of money?' asked Monsieur Surbach, sharply.

'I am afraid he never thinks about it,' said Pierre, shrugging his shoulders.

'When a man borrows money without knowing how it is to be repaid, I consider it much the same as stealing,' said Monsieur Surbach, with severity.

'So I think,' replied Pierre. Yet he felt a little offended on Marc's account. If a really strong affection had existed between the brothers, it would have been impossible for Pierre thus to have exposed all Marc's weaknesses and faults. But he had more good sense than tenderness; if René was to help them in this matter, he thought he must know the evil before he could remedy it; so he told him all, without exaggeration, but also without softening anything.

'I have no time to lose,' said René, after reflecting a minute; 'where can I find your brother?'

'There he is at the end of the street,' said Pierre.

They had got back by this time nearly to their own door, and Marc was just going in to dinner. He never failed to come home at meal times, for, in spite of his

carelessness and folly, he had sense enough left to know that a bad dinner at a restaurant would have cost more than a day's provision for the whole family ; and, standing as he was on the very brink of a precipice, he was not yet lost to all sense of propriety and right feeling.

Monsieur Surbach looked searchingly at the young man, who was quite unconscious of the examination of which he was the object. Marc was very handsome, with a frank open expression and an engaging manner, but there was a look of weakness about the mouth, and something of indecision in the expression of the eyes, which revealed to the careful observer the chief faults of his character.

René had no difficulty, when he saw him, in understanding the strong affection that Elizabeth showed for her eldest brother, of which he had learnt further instances from Pierre in their late conversation.

'If I were Elizabeth,' Pierre had said in speaking of her, 'I should send him about his business, with his unsolved problems and his unlearnt theory. But not she ! Her patience is unwearied ; she goes to work again and again, as if she did not see that he was never getting on a bit. Everything he knows has been knocked into his head by dint of hard work from her.'

'Marc !' exclaimed Pierre, as his brother was about to enter the house without having seen them; 'here is Monsieur Surbach, the step-son of our uncle, Monsieur Delahais, who has been good enough to come and see us by his father's desire.'

'My uncle is not ill, I hope?' said Marc, with natural courtesy.

'The *mauvais sujet* is more polite than any of them,' thought René, as he held out his hand to Marc.

They were all about to enter when René stopped.

'You are going to dinner,' he said, 'so I will leave you for a little. I will return later in the evening, and if you like we can have a walk together on the Boulevards.'

'Do you know Paris?' said Marc. 'We could show you—'

'I was educated in Paris,' said René, smiling. 'I shall see you again presently;' and so saying, he left them.

'I could not venture to ask him to dinner,' said Marc, in a tone of vexation. 'If we are reduced to tough beef and potatoes we must dine alone.'

'Do you think he would have expected to find truffles at our table?' retorted Pierre; but secretly he

agreed with Marc, and had felt exactly the same embarrassment.

The economy which Elizabeth was obliged to practise made it impossible for her to invite chance visitors to dinner. But to neither of the brothers did it occur to think about the mistress of the house at all in the matter.

René Surbach, however, was not unmindful of her convenience, and when he came back to call for Marc, he would not even go into the sitting-room.

With his usual judgment and tact, Pierre excused himself from going with them. 'I have my work to do,' he said, when his brother pressed him to join them.

Ignorant as Marc was of Elizabeth's application, and of the reasons which had brought Monsieur Surbach to Paris, the poor boy shrank instinctively from being alone with this envoy from his uncle, dreading the questions that might be put to him, and standing already in awe of René's penetrating eyes.

'Yet, after all, he is a man of the world,' he thought, as he descended the stairs; 'he will understand my position.'

Poor Marc! who looked upon himself already as 'a man of the world!'

They were together a long time; and when they retraced their steps homewards René, without having betrayed the motive of his visit, had not only learnt to know Marc, but, though he saw very much to blame, he had also learnt to like him. His most serious faults of character proceeded from weakness, and he had been severely tried by the austere life imposed upon the orphans. That Monsieur Surbach should have been so quick to comprehend and so ready to pardon this kind of fault said much in his favour, for his own nature was the very reverse of Marc's, being strong even to hardness. But from his earliest days he had embraced the principles of Christianity, and if he practised them in his own life with inflexible strictness, they had also taught him charity enough to make him judge others less severely than he judged himself.

'What this boy wants is sound principle,' he said to himself, as he listened to poor Marc's embarrassed confessions; 'and that he will find nowhere but in the law of God.'

René Surbach, however, never preached except by his actions. He pressed Marc's hand on bidding him good-night.

'You must before everything free yourself from the

millstone that is round your neck,' he said. ' You cannot recover yourself and set to work in earnest while you are suffering anxiety on account of your debts. Make an exact list of all that you owe, and let me know the amount.'

Marc's colour rose painfully ; he was deeply ashamed, and seemed disposed to resent René's proposal, seductive as was the prospect of deliverance. Monsieur Surbach saw the feeling of pride in the young man, and liked him none the less for it.

' I say this on my father's part,' he added. ' You know if it had not been for the rupture between the families he would have been your guardian, and he feels as much bound to help you as if he were. Good-bye ; I shall see you again to-morrow.'

When René left him Marc went straight to his room, and spent the whole night thinking over everything that his new friend had said. With his head buried in his hands he racked his brains to recollect every small sum that he had ever borrowed, noting down everything on a sheet of paper. On adding it all up he was horrified to find how much larger the amount was than he expected.

' I should never have thought that I owed more than a hundred francs,' he murmured in a low voice.

The sum total lying before him was more than five times that amount.

'And I have sold so many of the books, too! How Monsieur Surbach will despise me!'

In Marc's place Monsieur Surbach would have begun by despising himself; but the poor boy's energetic repentance did not carry him quite so far as that.

René said nothing on receiving the list from him the next day. He put it into his pocket-book, and then, as on the preceding evening, he invited Marc to go out with him. This time they went in an omnibus to the Bois de Boulogne.

'Why should we not take a cab?' said Marc, carelessly.

'The omnibus is quite good enough for me,' Monsieur Surbach answered, shaking his head; he saw more and more clearly how Marc came to be in debt.

When they had reached a quiet walk René drew from his pocket the paper which Marc had given him.

'Are you quite sure that this is all?' he asked.

'All that I can remember,' stammered the young man, greatly embarrassed. 'I never put anything down.'

'But if you have forgotten anything, how do you mean to repay it?'

'After I have taken my degree——'

'When you are an ensign? You have not yet entered St. Cyr, and you must remain there two years; your creditors will never wait all that time — You are not paying interest, are you?' he added, as a sudden doubt crossed his mind.

'My companions are not usurers!' exclaimed Marc, hotly.

'Think carefully,' said René; 'be sure that you have forgotten nothing; now is the time to remember.'

'I believe that is all,' he said.

'Here it is then,' said René, handing him the exact amount of the debts. 'Have I your word of honour that everything shall be paid before the end of the week?'

'Yes,' stammered Marc.

'And when your mind is free from this anxiety you will work hard?'

'Yes,' repeated the boy.

'The future of your family as well as your own depends on what you do now,' continued René. 'You owe it to your sister and your brothers to work for them.'

René spoke earnestly, and Marc, who had hitherto thought more of the rights of an elder brother than of his duties, was overcome with mingled emotions of gratitude and shame.

'I will work, indeed,' he replied.

'I count upon you,' said René, pressing his hand. 'I shall not see you to-morrow. When does your examination begin?'

'In eight days,' said Marc, with dismay. By the light of his newly-made resolutions he saw how precious was the time that he had lost.

René looked very grave.

'There is no help for it,' he thought. 'I must stay till the examination is over. He will not pass, and he will be in despair; his sister, too, will be miserable, and will perhaps be too severe with him. I think he has confidence in me; I must help him to bear his defeat, or take him home with me, which would please my father.'

Marc went to bed and slept soundly after the agitation of the day, with his money safely deposited under his pillow. But René Surbach passed the night in writing business letters, necessitated by the length of his proposed absence.

Before he had ever seen Elizabeth Monsieur Surbach had been strongly prejudiced against her, and he had not liked her much at their first interview; but he was now beginning to perceive that she must be a woman of remarkable strength, uprightness, and nobility of character; and he saw that in her youthful ignorance and

timidity, she was in danger of breaking down under the weight of her anxieties and doubts respecting the conduct of Marc. The interest with which she inspired him showed itself in the exertions which he had begun to make on behalf of her brother. For the first time in his life, perhaps, the young merchant without an effort was putting aside his business and its calls upon him, and resolving to devote himself to the task of rendering effectual help to his adopted father's nephew, without enquiring too closely how much Monsieur Delahais' niece had to do with that resolution.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHECK.

MARC was now working hard and straining every nerve for the final effort; but he found to his sorrow that during the months of idleness through which he had passed he had lost much of the habit of study. It was René who had delivered him from the spell by which he had been bound; René who encouraged him in his task; and for this stranger he had conceived the warmest affection, which strengthened every day. To please René, to gain René's esteem, Marc worked as no sense of duty and no desire for the happiness of his own family had ever prompted him to work.

Elizabeth, far from being jealous, was full of gratitude towards M. Surbach. He had succeeded in arousing in Marc's mind that sentiment of self-respect which she had in vain endeavoured to call forth. In spite of the humiliation he had suffered at the avowal of

his faults, in spite of the shame which he still occasionally felt at the thought of them, Marc had risen in his own esteem. The load which had kept him down had been removed, and he no longer walked with his head bent down and his eyes on the ground, like a man who wished to avoid recognition.

His indefatigable teacher had now no cause to complain of her pupil's idleness ; all day long Marc studied his theory or worked at his problems, Elizabeth being continually at his side. The housekeeping went on as if by magic, although René Surbach had more than once taken his place at their simple repasts. He had become as one of the family, and Elizabeth treated him as she might have done another brother.

He spent every evening with them, helping Marc with his work. They were all striving for the same object, and each felt secretly the same fear. Both René Surbach and Pierre were sure that Marc would not pass, and Elizabeth feared that he would not ; yet she sometimes tried to persuade herself that her fears were needless. When she read over the examination papers they seemed to her so simple that a very little close work, she hoped, might suffice to give him a chance of passing.

As for Marc himself, he was so surprised to find himself working steadily, so happy to feel his conscience

at rest, that he was not quite without hope. Twenty times a day he repeated to himself, 'What if I should happen to pass, after all !'

Alas ! such things happen only to those who deserve them. Marc's name did not appear even in the list of those who were chosen as eligible ; 'and they are more numerous than usual this year, because they are in want of officers,' said Pierre, who felt the humiliation bitterly.

When the examination was over his brothers waited for Marc as he left the examination hall. One glance was enough to reveal the truth. He walked with heavy steps and downcast eyes, and with his hat pulled over his brow—all the old signs which had disappeared of late under the influence of René Surbach.

Elizabeth was prepared for the worst. The last day's questions had proved to her that Marc must fail not only in mathematics, but in almost every subject of examination. When her two younger brothers returned she received them calmly. Poor Henri had tears in his eyes, and she smiled sadly as she stooped to kiss him. Pierre came in without speaking, and leant against the window.

'If I were Marc I should never come back,' he muttered to himself.

A sudden terror seized Elizabeth.

'Where is he?' she said quickly. 'Have you left him alone in his trouble? My poor Marc!' And she was about to rush to the door as if to seek for him, but Pierre prevented her. His sister's devoted affection touched him deeply.

'You are better than I am,' he said, as if the confession was forced from him. 'And so is M. Surbach; he is with Marc.'

Elizabeth went back to her seat with a sigh of relief; she felt that she could depend on René.

And René depended upon her. He had carried Marc away with him to the river-side, where they walked along the quays, without thinking where they went—walking on merely for the sake of walking. Marc was silent, and his companion thought it best to give him time to reflect.

'He is suffering, but it will do him good,' thought M. Surbach. With his stern sense of justice he felt that the boy had deserved to suffer. The consequences of sin cannot be effaced in this world by the forgiveness of man, nor even of God himself; the sorrow and humiliation which overwhelmed Marc at this moment were the necessary consequences of his levity, indolence, and culpable weakness.



[To face p. 149



THE CHECK

'He will forget it all quickly enough!' thought M. Surbach, who himself never forgot anything. As he walked in silence by Marc's side the recollection of having once missed a prize at college, entirely through his own fault, came back to his mind with a vivid sense of shame, although fifteen years had passed.

Suddenly Marc stopped, and turning to René, 'What if I were to throw myself in there?' he said, looking down into the river.

'Can you swim?' asked René, with an imperturbable air.

Marc shook his head.

'It would be no use,' he murmured under his breath.

'In that case you would drown yourself, and that would be one folly more.'

Marc made no answer, and they continued their aimless walk in silence.

Presently René stopped.

'Your sister is alone and in trouble; you could comfort her, and you ought to do it.'

'Elizabeth?' he exclaimed, and all the bitterness of his spirit burst forth. 'I dare not see Elizabeth! It is because of her that I wish never to go home again! She who never flags, who does not know what it is to be idle; she who was always ready to make me work,

to urge me forward, to help me——! she who told me that I should fail—that I, a Bauville, would never pass an examination on the theory of arithmetic !' and he clenched his hand in passion.

'She knows her duty, and she loves you,' replied René, gravely, as he took the young man by the arm.

The poor boy turned away his face to hide the tears which he could not repress. He made no resistance when René changed the direction of their steps and walked towards the Faubourg St. Jacques. At this moment the sun, which had been shining brightly all the morning, was suddenly hidden, and heavy drops of rain began to fall. Marc leant unconsciously on René's arm, and removed his hat that the cool air might refresh his burning brow. As his emotion calmed itself René's strong will and energetic nature regained their influence over him, and by the side of his friend, as he loved to call him, he felt himself upheld and fortified.

'I will work with my hands if necessary,' he thought, 'but never in my life will I undergo another examination !' He did not, however, venture to say aloud what he thus vowed to himself in secret.

René's plans for him were very different. He had accompanied him in his walk in order to give him time to grow calm, and now he went back with him to the

house, in order that he might be present at the painful meeting between the brother and sister.

They entered the little room together, but, before Marc could say a word, René, so discreet and so reserved on all ordinary occasions, walked up to Elizabeth. ‘I have brought him back to you, Mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘but only for a short time; to-morrow I start for the Haute Marne, and Marc will go with me. We will work together during the vacation, which need not prevent our sometimes having a day’s shooting, and when he comes back you will find your pupil ready to work as hard as you like. What do you say, Marc?’

Marc could not speak, but he made a signal of assent as he listened in astonishment to the proposal, or rather the decision of René. Before he had ventured to raise his eyes to Elizabeth he felt her hand on his shoulder and her kiss on his forehead; and when he looked into her face he saw nothing of that terrible expression of contempt which he had once seen there and had never forgotten, for her eyes were full of tears.

For the first time she gave her hand to M. Surbach.

‘Thank you,’ she said, warmly, as she looked at Marc with an expression of the deepest tenderness.

René pressed her hand and left the room; he felt that he might now safely leave the brother and sister

together. The inexhaustible patience of a mother's love might sometimes be lacking in Elizabeth, but all the affection, compassion, and courage that filled her heart found expression in her face as she embraced Marc once more after M. Surbach's departure.

'Be comforted,' she whispered to him; 'with God's help we shall get over this.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRAVELLER.

MARC went to the Forge with René Surbach. Before they started René summoned courage to ask Elizabeth why she should not accompany her brother—indeed, all her brothers—to the country.

‘My father has a great wish to see you,’ he said; ‘he is so old and infirm that I fear his travelling days are over; could you not give him the pleasure of a visit?’

Elizabeth shook her head. Her income was not of a kind to allow much for travelling expenses.

‘It is not possible for me to leave Paris,’ she said.

René urged her further, though he did not venture to say what he certainly thought, that the saving in housekeeping expenses during the vacation would cover the cost of the journey. In spite of his good sense, René did not realize the difficulties that accompany

poverty. He did not know that Elizabeth's whole wardrobe consisted of two gowns and a bonnet.

'Might not Henri, at least, come with us?'

'I cannot go without you,' said the child, pressing close to her side.

'And Pierre?' This invitation was not very cordially given; M. Surbach was not greatly taken with the dry, cold student, with whom no one found fault, but whom no one seemed to love.

Pierre smiled scornfully. In his heart he disapproved of this journey of Marc's. It seemed to him unjust to reward with special marks of affection those very qualities of weakness, idleness, and levity which lead young men into evil courses, and from which he knew himself to be free.

'I must work,' he said, dryly. He was about to add, 'I do not intend to run any risk of not passing,' but his good angel stopped him in time.

So Marc alone went. René little suspected all the fatigue that this unexpected journey caused Elizabeth. She was obliged to sit up all night to get her brother's slender wardrobe into order, for during the last eight or ten days she had been so absorbed in his examination that she had allowed her needlework to accumulate. She had to mend all his clothes now, while Marianne

stood at her washing-tub, grumbling, for in the little household the linen was all washed by Marianne, and ironed by Elizabeth. In spite, too, of all her efforts, when morning came the daylight revealed so many defects that she called to Marc, who was packing his books, ‘I see you cannot do without a new suit of clothes. You must go and buy them as quickly as you can, for you have no time to lose.’ And she gave him at the same time the money necessary for his journey.

‘You will ruin yourself, my poor sister,’ said Marc, a little sadly. ‘I do not deserve this pleasant journey’ (in spite of himself he could not help rejoicing at the thought of it); ‘but it is René’s doing; he never mentioned it to me before he spoke of it to you as a settled thing—and I think if I could only live with him for a month, it would give me courage enough to last my whole life.’

Elizabeth turned away. She whose courage had always been ready to sustain others, felt herself suddenly on the point of breaking down. Such a foolish longing to go with him to the country took possession of her, such a sense of depression, of loneliness, of desertion, as if all the sorrows of her past life were pressing upon her at once. She pushed aside her

work-basket, and, hastily saying to Marianne that she would return directly, she hurried to her own room. Having closed the door, she poured out to her Heavenly Father all her troubles, all her anxiety and depression of spirits; she accused herself of selfishness and cowardice, and she determined to shake off the weakness that had come over her, and to take up her cross again and bear it bravely. Fortified by renewed courage, she cheerfully bade good-bye to Marc and M. Surbach.

'I have not written to my uncle,' she said to the latter; 'I am afraid of troubling him, but you will tell him how much we thank him.'

A single look was all that René received as his own share of reward, but he thought himself entitled to take her hand.

'You will write to me, Marc?' she said, with a meaning smile.

Marc's indolence in the matter of letter-writing was proverbial in the family; René, however, promised for him without hesitation.

'I am sure he will,' he said, decidedly.

Marc laughed.

'I believe I shall, since René says so,' he answered.

When the travellers were gone, the little household became quieter than ever. Elizabeth put aside the

books that she had been reading with Marc before his examination for St. Cyr, and returned again to her own studies. She worked, however, with an effort that surprised herself; she found her thoughts wandering continually to the Forge, and the sight of a letter from Marc caused her the liveliest pleasure.

‘What a child he is still !’ she said to herself on seeing the boyish handwriting of her eldest brother ; and she thought with sadness that some men remain children all their lives.

‘René is altogether master here,’ wrote Marc ; ‘my uncle is always ill with gout, and I doubt if he has ever been so fond of his forges and his furnaces as René is. My aunt is a nice-looking old lady, with white hair as soft as silk, all in curls under her cap, just as René’s will be when he is old.’

‘I hope he will not wear a cap,’ said Henri, laughing. He was reading over his sister’s shoulder.

‘She and my uncle spend the whole day in the garden, and yet the trees and flowers are all black with smoke, which spoils the country a good deal. René troubles himself very little about the smoke. He rides on horseback to the different works, and he keeps the men in pretty good order, I can tell you. My uncle says, laughing, “Now that the cat has come back, the mice

will have no more play." My uncle is very good to me ; he has given, or rather lent, me a horse, that I may accompany René when he goes out hunting. The forest, they say, is very fine ; I shall see it when the hunting begins. At present I work six hours a day' (Henri opened his eyes and smiled as he looked up at Elizabeth) ; 'in the evening René examines my work, and woe betide me if I have been idle. He says that I ought to be able to pass in January. I had, indeed, vowed that no one should ever catch me at an examination again ; but if I must try once more, it is a great pity that you and Henri could not have come here too, that we might all have been together until the terrible moment. I am quite sure my uncle was disappointed at not seeing you. I heard Madame Delahais the first evening say, as she took off her spectacles, "I do not understand it ! M. Delahais would have liked nothing better than to have paid all the expenses of their journey."

"Mademoiselle de Bauville," I heard René answer —but he spoke so low that I lost the rest ; I fancy, however, it was something like this : " You little know Mademoiselle de Bauville if you think she is the sort of person to whom one could make a proposal of that kind."

And that was exactly what M. Surbach did answer.

Elizabeth refolded her letter and took up her work in silence, making her needle fly more rapidly than usual.

'It is not enough for Marc that he has been obliged to accept help in the payment of his debts,' she thought, 'but he would burden others with paying for our amusements, too ! Some day I hope I shall be able to pay back that five hundred francs !'

It had cost Elizabeth a great effort, both of reason and of Christian humility, to consent that Marc should accept this help from his uncle.

'It is best that it should be so,' René had assured her.

And she had tried to believe it. It was good for Marc to feel all the weight of his fault, but the heaviest part of the punishment often fell upon her.

In answer to his letters Marc received only a few lines from his sister. She dreaded his extreme openness with René.

'He shows his letters to everybody,' she said to herself.

But Henri, who was fond of scribbling, made up for her brevity by a voluminous correspondence.

'Do you know I shall be quite glad when the classes begin again,' he wrote in September, just at the time

that Marc was enjoying a few days' riding and hunting in the forest.

'There is no fun here in the holidays ; Pierre works like a horse, and when he is not working he has a headache. Elizabeth cannot get out much, for Marianne is ill, and she has all the house work to attend to. What she dislikes most, I think, is being obliged to go to market. I wanted to go with her, but she will not let me. She goes out with her basket so early in the morning that I am sure the shops are not always open.'

Marc kept this letter to himself. The idea of his sister being obliged to go to market with a basket on her arm hurt his pride as a son of the house of Bauville.

Pierre and Henri had done all they could to persuade her to have some assistance.

'Why should you not get a woman in to help you ?' said Pierre.

'Marianne ill costs more than Marianne well,' replied Elizabeth. 'Before engaging servants one should have money to pay for them.' This argument was unanswerable. Pierre's natural horror of debt had been increased by Marc's embarrassments, and he could say no more. When the two brothers heard the house door shut softly before they were up in the morning, they knew it was Elizabeth gone about her marketing, and Pierre determined to work harder than ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARD TIMES.

T must have been one of those natural instincts which sometimes warn us of coming misfortune that had caused Elizabeth's spirits to sink so low at the time of Marc's departure. She had always borne all the burdens it had pleased God to lay upon her so bravely ; and, what was still more rare, she had never aggravated her sorrows by impatience or vain regrets.

But she was now about to be tried more severely than ever ; she was to enter the dark valley whose terrors would tax all her strength.

Marc was at the Forge, happy and safe ; he was working, and his sister hoped that during his stay with M. Surbach he would acquire some of those principles which she would have laid down her life to give him.

Henri was well, and was at all times a comfort to

her. These were the bright spots in her sky; and on these Elizabeth fixed her eyes stedfastly, thanking God for them. All the rest was dark.

Marianne's state became more and more serious; her health was completely breaking down. The young doctor whom she had herself called in, and in whom she placed much confidence, from having seen him attend a neighbour who was dying, shook his head when Elizabeth asked his opinion of her.

'Her constitution is quite worn out,' he said. 'There is no positive illness, but she is fading away like a lamp that has no more oil.'

Elizabeth sighed; she felt most bitterly what a loss this old friend would be, and she mourned for her beforehand, with a sadness that was mixed with remorse. It was in the service of her family that Marianne had spent all her strength, and it was the ruin of her family that had ruined Marianne. The savings of her long life had been placed in M. de Bauville's hands, and had been confided along with his own fortune to the banker whom he believed to be his friend. Her little all was swallowed up along with the large fortune of her mistress in that worthless man's failure. At the age of seventy Marianne was as penniless as she had been at twenty, when she first left her native village. The only

treasure that she had preserved was her watch, which had been given to her long ago by Madame de Bauville on the occasion of Elizabeth's birth.

'I shall leave it to Henri,' she used often to say. 'All the others have had watches for years; and, besides, of all the boys he is my favourite.'

Since her illness, and especially of late, when it was evident that death was approaching with rapid strides, she said repeatedly, 'I will leave my watch to my little Henri.' She showed him how to wind it up, and at what hour, and how in cold weather to place it on a soft cushion. It engrossed her thoughts so much, that Elizabeth laughingly told her she made quite an idol of it.

'If I had an idol,' said the old woman, looking at Elizabeth with the eyes of a mother; and her look said plainly, 'it would be you.' 'I know God does not wish us to make idols of anything, and I try to do His will—— I have nothing else now to do.' She looked sadly at her thin hands and arms—now so useless.

'I can still eat; the more's the pity,' she said to the doctor, whom she begged in vain to discontinue his visits. 'Leave me to die in peace; perhaps it may be quicker so.'

But Elizabeth and the young doctor understood each

other. When he came back several days later he found Marianne still living, but much weaker. And now a new fear took possession of the poor woman's mind.

'I have brought this young man here,' she thought; 'it is on my account that he has set foot in the house; what if he should take it into his head to come for Elizabeth? We are two old fools, M. Delahais and I; he sent his step-son instead of coming himself, and here am I imagining myself in need of a doctor, and a young doctor! If I could only see my old Lebreton!'

Marianne had indeed hoped to see Elizabeth married, but well married. 'Now,' she thought, 'I shall know it only in heaven.'

Elizabeth grew pale and thin under the heavy task that was imposed upon her; she nursed Marianne night and day with the devotion of a daughter, and she had all the work of the house to do alone, for she was obliged to be more economical than ever, in order to defray the expenses of so long an illness. It became rarer every day to see meat at their table, and when Elizabeth did provide anything nourishing, she always forced her brothers to take the greatest part of it; she herself often dined on a piece of bread. Pierre never complained, but sometimes, as he rose from table, he

muttered, 'I should like to know what M. Marc has had for dinner to-day at the Forge.'

Elizabeth also sometimes wondered if Marc ever thought of the extreme difficulties of their life at home, in the midst of the abundance with which he was surrounded at M. Delahais'. In one of his late letters he had said :

' I am in a difficulty, my dear Elizabeth. You know I spend a great part of the day in the forest after my work is done ; René is not so indulgent as you are, I can tell you, and he likes me to be home in good time for dinner. But when I am once in the forest I have no idea how the time goes ; one cannot see the sun under these great trees ; and, besides, I was never very good at telling the time in that way. One day I came home too late for dinner, and displeased Madame Delahais, who is very particular on account on my uncle's delicate health, she says ; and she has been a little cold to me ever since. You must have seen that for some time before I left home I was without my watch. A long time ago I pledged it at a pawnbroker's for sixty francs. If you should happen to have such a sum to spare (and you know I have not cost you anything for a month past), you might, perhaps, redeem it for me. The ticket is in my chest of drawers. I have often thought of selling it, but

I did not do it because it was a gift from mamma. You will have nothing to do but to send Marianne for it; it is not far, and it will be a walk for her. When you have got it you can send it to me by post, and then I shall always be able to be home in good time.'

When this letter arrived, poor Marianne had been for more than a week confined to bed. Elizabeth had, it is true, exactly sixty francs in her drawer, but it was all that she had to live upon for a fortnight, and to provide all that was necessary for the sick woman. Without hesitating a moment she took from her neck her own watch, which she had worn ever since she was ten years old—a beautiful, enamelled watch which had been given to her, too, by her mother.

'You are not like most little girls,' Madame de Baulieu had said to her; 'you do not care for trinkets; so I have chosen this watch for you, which is useful and at the same time, I think, very pretty.' And the choice showed the poor mother's taste.

Elizabeth was very fond of her watch, and she sighed as she packed it carefully in a little box, which she took herself to the post, along with this letter to Marc:

'I have certainly sixty francs in the house, but it is all that we four have to live upon till September 22. Marianne's illness costs me more than your living would

have done ; and, besides, you forget, my dear boy, that it took more money to pay for your journey than it would have done to feed you at home. I have sent you therefore my own watch, since I am unable to redeem yours. Take great care of it, for it was also a present from our mother, and I have worn it ever since she gave it to me. My poor Marianne will go no more messages ; the doctor says she will never rise from her bed again.'

Marc coloured violently when he read Elizabeth's letter ; but nevertheless he put on the watch. Madame Delahais noticed it immediately. That good lady, not having very much to occupy her, observed with the closest attention everything that went on around her.

'What a beautiful watch you have there, Marc !— quite a little jewel, and all enamelled like a lady's watch. I don't think you had that when you first arrived ; may I look at it ?'

And she was going on with her remarks when René looked up from the newspaper he was reading and glanced at Marc, who with much embarrassment put back the watch into his pocket.

'It has been sent to you by Mademoiselle de Bauville,' he said in a decided tone.

Marc made no reply ; and Madame Delahais under-

stood that her son wished the subject to drop, so she said no more.

If the appearance of Elizabeth's watch at the Forge caused some astonishment, its disappearance did not pass unnoticed at Paris.

One day, as Elizabeth bent over Marianne's bed to arrange the bed-clothes, the black ribbon which she wore round her neck, and to which her watch had been attached, caught in the handle of a cup, and was disengaged from her waistband, disclosing only a small locket that had held her mother's hair. Elizabeth hastily replaced the locket, but the sick woman followed the action with her eyes.

'Have you broken the glass of your watch?' she asked.

'No,' said Elizabeth.

'Then is it the mainspring? It will cost six francs to mend it!'

'I have not broken anything about it; you are always thinking of watches, Marianne. Attend to your own, and leave mine in peace.'

'I shall soon leave you in peace,' murmured the old woman sadly.

Elizabeth, ashamed of her impatience, bent down towards the pillow. 'I have sent it to M. Marc, who was always coming in too late for dinner.'

'And where is his own ?'

'At the pawnbroker's.'

That evening Marianne held a long conversation with Henri in a low voice. The poor woman was so agitated and incoherent, and she stopped so often to recover her breath, that the little boy looked at her with terror; but she talked incessantly, and he did not dare to leave the room. Before the next morning she was dead, and Henri told them with many sobs how she had charged him to give her watch to Marc, because he had need of it at the Forge, and to get back Elizabeth's from him.

'I did not understand all she said ; she spoke in such a low voice, and I could not ask her to repeat it. But that was the last thing she said to me.'

Happily, Elizabeth had gathered words of greater comfort from her. As she held the dying woman in her arms that night, Marianne had said : 'I have always served Monsieur and Madame faithfully, and you after them. I have not served God as I ought, but I know He has pardoned me for the love of His Son, and I trust in Him that He will have pity on me. I am going to Monsieur and Madame, and we will wait for you together.'

When the last breath was drawn, Elizabeth closed her

old friend's eyes ; and as she sat there, watching by the bedside, all the old feeling of desolation came over her that she had felt before when her mother and her father died.

' You look as if you were a hundred years old,' said Pierre, when she went to awake him and tell him that all was over. ' Go and lie down a little ; I will sit up and do what is necessary to be done.'

This was a great effort for Pierre to make ; and Elizabeth, weakened as she was by her late exertions, was comforted by his kind words. She bent down to kiss him, and was startled to find his forehead damp and cold. She was alarmed, she hardly knew why, and she went into her room with a new fear at her heart.

I have heard it said by one who has suffered much, that trouble always takes us by surprise. And it is no doubt for a merciful reason that God permits us to be blind to the future, for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Elizabeth had been so absorbed of late, first in her anxiety about Marc, and afterwards in nursing Marianne, that she had had no time to think about Pierre. The most reserved and the least affectionate of her brothers, he was separated from her by his own act, refusing to accept any help from

her in his studies. He had for some time been working hard at mathematics, for he was secretly ambitious of passing at the Polytechnic before the age at which Marc had failed in his examination for St. Cyr. So unworthy an ambition could not be openly confessed, but the reason that he gave for working so hard was no less insulting to Marc.

'I must leave myself time, in case I fail to pass.'

Elizabeth herself never knew with what eagerness he was working, for he rejected all her offers of help in his examinations. The great power of application which she had inherited from her father was possessed also by Pierre ; but Elizabeth, at the time of her most passionate devotion to study, in the old La Treille days, was twenty-one, and all her physical and intellectual powers had attained their full development. Pierre was not yet eighteen ; he was tall and thin, and the delicate and almost girlish complexion which he still retained, to his extreme regret, was subject to constant and sudden variations. He ate very little, and indeed the nourishment which their table had afforded for the last month had been barely sufficient for young appetites.

He offered to take his turn in watching beside the body of Marianne, so as to relieve Elizabeth, who was

evidently on the point of breaking down under her fatigues. But the nervous excitement under which he carried out his self-imposed task, added to the shock of the sudden awakening, hastened on an attack of illness for which his long-continued strain of work had been slowly preparing him. When Henri, who was afraid to go into the room, called him in the morning, he walked a few steps with difficulty, then staggered and fell back into his chair.

Henri in great alarm ran to call Elizabeth.

'It is nothing,' said Pierre, with his usual reserve ;
'I have a pain in my head. Go and ask Monsieur——'

He wished to send for the young doctor who had attended Marianne, but he could not remember his name. His eyes became fixed and dull, and Elizabeth, helping him to his room, placed him on the bed, and then sent Henri, quite subdued with terror, to fetch the doctor.

'Tell him that Marianne is dead and that Pierre is ill.'

'Is he very ill?' asked the child, overpowered by all the emotions of the morning.

'I hope not ; go quickly.'

'Alas! Pierre *was* very ill. In this attack, which Elizabeth hoped might be nothing more than a violent

headache that would soon pass away, the doctor at once recognised all the signs of an overworked brain.

'He has worked beyond his strength,' he said. 'The brain has received a shock, and, like a sprained hand or foot, nothing will cure it but absolute rest.'

Pierre seemed quite unconscious of what they were saying, as he lay stretched upon the bed with his eyes closed, as if to shut out the light. But after a time he raised himself, and, looking in their faces, 'I cannot add up a figure,' he exclaimed in a terrified voice; 'I have forgotten everything that I ever learnt!'

'It will come back again. Do not fear, it will all come back.' And the doctor tried to replace his head on the pillow.

'But I cannot remember a single line of Virgil! I am becoming an idiot!'

His face was full of terror; he was evidently making the most desperate efforts to recover that memory of which he was so proud, and which seemed to be deserting him.

'If you do not give your memory complete rest, you will never remember anything again,' said the doctor impatiently.

He gave him a composing draught; but unfortunately narcotics did not suit Pierre, and instead of calming,

it only excited him still more. Their old medical man, Lebreton, would not have had recourse to this remedy, but the young doctor did not know Pierre's constitution. Elizabeth, although she was brave and willing, was not naturally fitted for a sick nurse, and she had never possessed the same influence over Pierre that she had over the others. He passed a restless day, and during the night he became delirious. When the doctor arrived the next morning, he found Elizabeth pale, distressed, and almost worn out with watching, for she had never left Pierre's side since he saw her the day before.

In his delirium he was incessantly repeating algebraical equations.

'He has not forgotten as much as he thinks,' said the doctor, after listening to him for a few minutes; 'the propositions are quite correct. But we cannot allow this to go on; it is absolutely necessary to calm him, or brain fever will set in, and then——'

'And then he will be lost!' said Elizabeth, so sadly that the doctor, accustomed as he was to the sight of human suffering, was touched to the heart.

'Do you know a good nurse?' he asked.

Elizabeth knew no one now, rich or poor; for more than two years she had lived in a little world of her own, so secluded that she had not made a single new acquaintance; and her father had possessed few friends.

People who were indifferent to his society even when he was rich and prosperous, were not likely to seek the acquaintance of his children in their poverty.

'I will send you a good woman,' said the doctor, as he left her; and Elizabeth, now at length quite subdued by the weight of her troubles, made no resistance. The kind doctor also undertook to see the last services paid to Marianne.

For three days the delirium raged at its height, and Elizabeth never left the sick boy's side. The nurse who was sent was a good woman, a little of a gossip, but with a heart full of pity for the orphans—a feeling which she did not, however, venture to express before Elizabeth.

'That young lady has such an imposing manner,' she said confidentially to the doctor, who smiled at the pompous term the good woman had used; but in his heart he quite agreed with her; he also thought Elizabeth imposing.

Pierre was sleeping at last; the large eyes, generally so bright, but dull now except when kindled by delirium, had closed for the first time for three whole days. The nurse had just taken him out of a bath, and gently drawn down the blinds to darken the room. The silence was unbroken, except by the sounds from the street, which reached them on the fifth flat in a very

softened form through the half-open window. Elizabeth, as she sat at the foot of the bed, watching and praying, with her head leaning on her hands, took no note of the hours as they passed. Henri had come home from college, and the nurse had repeatedly looked in at the door, and closed it again softly, without speaking ; everything remained silent in the little room.

At last Elizabeth looked up and found that Pierre was awake, and was looking at her with an expression of consciousness in his eyes.

She bent down to him, keeping as calm as she could, but her heart was beating fast.

‘I have given it all up,’ he said, in a feeble but clear voice—that voice which used to be heard more distinctly at a distance than many voices of greater volume.

Elizabeth looked puzzled.

‘There is nothing left here,’ he said, pointing to his head—‘nothing but suffering ; ‘but I have given up the struggle ; I mean to be quite still ;’ and he closed his eyes again, as if he had resolved to accept God’s decree, and to give perfect rest to those faculties which he had abused.

Elizabeth looked at him for a moment in silence, and then, falling on her knees, she thanked God for her brother’s restoration to life.

CHAPTER XXII.

HELP.

 LIZABETH delayed sending the news of Pierre's illness to the Forge as long as she could. She knew that Marc was happy there, and she had no anxiety on his account as long as he stayed where he was. If, however, he should think of coming to Paris when he heard that Pierre was ill, his presence could only add to her anxieties and increase her expenses. She had fallen into a state of such lassitude and depression of spirits that she seemed to wish for nothing but repose that she might suffer in silence ; and Marc's presence would be anything but an element of repose.

She had written to him, but in her letter she had said as little as possible about her fears. Marc was anxious no doubt, but he did not think of returning home ; he did not even think of consulting René. There are few troubles that a boy under twenty will not easily forget

in the excitement of hunting in the forest, with a gun upon his shoulder and the dogs at his heels.

René, however, without telling Marc, had written to Henri, and at the end of his letter he said: 'I hope your sister is not herself ill with so much nursing of others ; her handwriting looks to me as if she were suffering from fatigue.'

Henri's answer was not long in coming. He wrote in the midst of their delight and thankfulness at the improvement in Pierre's condition.

'He has had some sleep, and he is no longer delirious; he lies quite still in his bed, and when Elizabeth gave him some broth he took it quite gently. I went into his room yesterday, but before that I could not venture to go in; I was so terrified to hear him raving the whole day long about figures that I stopped my ears, for I could not bear to listen to him. The nurse is very kind ; when she is with Pierre she takes care to make no noise, but she talks all the time she is in the kitchen. Elizabeth always sits up at night with Pierre, and she goes to bed for a little while in the day-time, but only for a little. I think she is very tired, and her eyes look quite black ; is not that strange when they are really blue ? Her letter to Marc was written at a corner of the table on which

all Pierre's medicine-bottles were standing, so, naturally, the writing would not be good. If you only knew how beautifully she used to write my copies for me long ago!' And the letter ended with these words : 'Are you not soon coming to see us again, M. Surbach ?'

The post arrived very early at the Forge, and René, as soon as he had read Henri's letter, left the rest of the contents of the post-bag untouched on the study table, and went straight to Marc's room.

'Pierre is much more ill than you think,' he said, 'and your sister is killing herself in nursing him ;' and he handed Marc the letter he had just received.

Marc, who was scarcely awake, held out his hand languidly.

René could hardly conceal his impatience..

'When you are in a condition to open your eyes, you will find me in the study,' he said dryly, and for the next quarter of an hour he vented on the envelopes of his business letters the irritation which he felt at Marc's indifference to his brother's health. But it was not Pierre's health only about which M. Surbach cared.

All feeling of anger, however, disappeared when the

young man came into the room, looking pale and with tears in his eyes.

'I must have read Elizabeth's letter imperfectly or not understood it—that is certain. My poor Pierre! I must go home at once. Dear René, you will not prevent me? If I can do nothing more, I can at least run messages, go for the doctor, or fetch the medicines. Henri is so young, and now that Marianne is gone Elizabeth is alone!'

M. Surbach had forgotten the death of the old servant; he broke into an exclamation: 'That is true! she has not even Marianne now! You are right, my dear Marc; you must go immediately, and I will go with you.'

Marc looked surprised. 'I can go perfectly well by myself,' he said, a little offended.

'Certainly, certainly; it is not to take care of you; but I wish to judge for myself as to Pierre's state. He was my first acquaintance in the family; I saw him before I saw you.'

'No, it was Elizabeth whom you saw first,' said Marc carelessly.

'Well, go and pack your bag,' said M. Surbach, with an impatient gesture. 'We will start by the express train to-night. Take nothing but what is

necessary. You will soon return, I hope, and finish your holiday here.'

'I should like nothing better if Pierre gets well soon. But the opening of college is very near now: I must make the most of the time that is left.'

And Marc, who was already comforted by simply communicating his fears, went off, 'to say good-bye to the rabbits,' he said, whistling to the dogs as he went.

René shrugged his shoulders as he listened to him. 'It will be impossible for me to leave her alone at such a time with this child,' he thought.

At nine o'clock that evening the two travellers started for Paris by the express train. At the same moment Elizabeth kissed Henri, and wished him good-night at the door of Pierre's room.

'I wish Marc was here and M. Surbach; they would never allow you to sit up all night.'

'That is no concern of M. Surbach,' she said, as she went into the sick room.

Pierre continued to improve; the fever had not returned, and the doctor said all was going on well.

'I told you from the first that we only needed time,' he said. 'Presently he must have change of air, and after that he will be all right—— There will not be a

trace of this left,' he added, in answer to a question which he read in Elizabeth's eyes.

The lesson of daily dependence on God is learnt nowhere so well as beside a sick bed, and Elizabeth was content to leave the future and its difficulties in His hands. Already, in order to defray the unusual expenses of the past few weeks, she had been obliged to sell out some of her shares.

'When he is well again I can work,' she thought. 'With God's help it is always possible to earn one's bread.' And on this strong rock she rested, lifted by the courage which springs from necessity above all present trials, through the grace of Him who imposed the burden.

At seven o'clock in the morning the nurse took Elizabeth's place by Pierre's side, and she went to lie down for two or three hours before getting breakfast. Henri helped her as much as he could in the work of the house, arranging the sitting-room nicely and waiting on her with quiet activity.

'I am your Henriette,' he used to say to her, laughing; and her thoughts went back to the dear little sister Henriette whom she had lost when she was only three months old.

'I have much need of a sister at present,' she said,

stroking Henri's cheeks; 'you must be a sister to me.'

At this early hour, however, Henri was still in bed. Elizabeth opened the parlour window that she might breathe the fresh morning air, and as she did so she saw on the opposite side of the street two men walking slowly up and down in front of the house as if they were waiting for some one. The next moment she saw that one of them was Marc, and with Marc—could it be possible?—there was, indeed, René Surbach.

She drew back her head, not knowing why such a rush of joy filled her heart that she thought she was going to faint. The next moment she went back to the window and waved her handkerchief. The two travellers, whose eyes were constantly directed to the windows of the fifth flat, saw the signal at once.

'Let us go up,' exclaimed Marc.' But it was René who was the first to mount the stairs, and it was by an effort that he restrained himself, on arriving at the top, from going in before his companion.

Elizabeth was at the door, looking pale and thin, and suffering from fatigue, but her eyes were full of happiness.

'He is better,' she said: 'he has had some good sleep.'

'And you—have you slept?' exclaimed Marc. 'You look like a ghost! Here have we been walking up and down for two hours, outside the house, for fear of awaking you! If I had only known I would have come up and made you go to bed.'

'Do not speak so loud; perhaps he is asleep again. I was just going to lie down, for I always have a few hours' sleep in the morning.'

And she led them into the little parlour.

'He is in my room,' she said, pointing to the door as she passed. 'Henri sleeps in yours, Marc, and I have taken his little closet for myself.'

She spoke with that complete forgetfulness of the outside world which is so natural to those who have been watching the sick-bed of some one dear to them. For the last ten days life out of doors had had no existence for her except as it affected Pierre.

René Surbach understood this, and yet he could not help feeling a sense of disappointment at his heart.

'Do not make any noise: he is asleep!'

Was this all she could find to say to them? She did not even seem to be surprised at their presence.

But René was wrong; for the first time in his life he was impatient and unjust.

'How good you are!' she said, turning suddenly to him as Marc was taking him to his room.

'Now you must go to bed,' her brother said to Elizabeth, on returning to the sitting-room. 'René and I will sit up for the future.'

'But you have been travelling all night!'

'And you have been sitting up for ten nights.'

Elizabeth resisted no longer. She did not know how completely worn out she was until now, when help had come. She could hardly keep herself awake in her chair. Five minutes afterwards she was in bed and fast asleep.

'I hope they will not disturb him by speaking too loud,' she murmured to herself as she shut her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A QUESTION.

 LIZABETH, greatly comforted by the arrival of the travellers, slept long and soundly. When she awakened she dressed herself hurriedly and ran into Pierre's room, ashamed of having slept so long. Pierre was awake, and Marc was sitting beside him, holding his hand. The two brothers were looking at each other with the old boyish affection in their faces, the coldness of the one and the carelessness of the other having both disappeared under the pressure of suffering and anxiety.

Elizabeth, who had often lamented their want of sympathy with each other, thanked God in her heart when she saw them.

'I have been sleeping so well,' said Pierre, quietly, as Elizabeth came up to his bed. 'You have brought me the best medicine in the world.'

'It is their own doing, not mine,' she whispered; her heart was too full to say more.

'René has gone off to his hotel,' said Marc. 'He has business to attend to, he told me, that would occupy him all day.'

René's business, it appeared, did not extend beyond the Faubourg St. Jacques, for two hours after he left them he returned, running quickly up the stairs to the fifth story. Henri opened the door to him.

'If you had not written to me we should never have known how things were going here,' he said to the boy as he shook him warmly by the hand.

'If you had not written first I should never have ventured to write to you,' replied Henri, to whom the receipt of a letter from M. Surbach had been a great surprise.

René found Elizabeth in the parlour, preparing the table for the long delayed meal.

'I have been calling on your doctor,' he said; 'he seems an intelligent man. He considers all danger to be past, but he wishes for his own satisfaction, as well as for that of yourself and my uncle, to have a consultation with Dr. Berchet. Will you allow him to make an appointment with this gentleman?'

Elizabeth listened anxiously.

'But about the future——did he say anything to you about Pierre's state afterwards——when he is well?'

'He told me that Pierre must have complete rest and change of occupation for a time; but, these two conditions fulfilled, he will recover all his strength and all his faculties.'

Elizabeth was so much affected by this clear and comprehensive answer that she could not speak. A feeling of faintness made her lean for a moment against the table. René made a movement as if to go to her, but stopped himself by an effort.

'Shall we say four o'clock?' he asked.

She made a sign of assent, and René disappeared. If during that day he passed the house ten times, always looking up at the windows of the fifth story, no doubt it was on the way to his business.

The two doctors arrived at four o'clock exactly, punctual to their time as busy men usually are.

Elizabeth had gently prepared her brother for the intended visit, fearing that he might be startled; but Pierre only smiled when she told him, and then closed his eyes.

'That is René's doing,' said Marc; 'we will not interfere with him.'

Pierre had fallen asleep when the celebrated physician

entered the room. As he silently examined the pale thin features, more delicate than ever now in illness, the eyes half opened, and Pierre looked at the doctor with a grave questioning expression that went to his heart. The examination was minute and comprehensive; and when at length all necessary questions had been asked and answered, Dr. Berchet replaced the sick boy on his pillows with the tenderness of a woman, and stooping down, ‘You will get over this, and live to be a man,’ he said softly, and immediately left the room.

After a few minutes’ conversation in the parlour with the younger doctor, he turned to Elizabeth, who was standing silently at the window.

‘This gentleman,’ he said, ‘will give you full directions for the treatment, which is very simple. I need only say to you now that he must have complete rest and relaxation for three months. During that time he must never open a book; and when he can travel he should go away to some place where the air is pure, but not too cold, for winter will soon be here. When he comes back he may work as hard as he likes, and if he does not do well I shall be very much astonished. His complete recovery depends simply upon rest, and good nourishing food.’

Before Elizabeth had time to thank him, he and his companion were both gone. She had wished to ask the young doctor if he would return as usual in the evening, but the words died away on her lips.

'There is a woman who neither talks nor cries,' said the physician, as he went downstairs. 'I never met with such a thing before!'

Elizabeth shed no tears, it is true, but her heart was full of thankfulness to God. When she returned to Pierre's room she found him asleep again, with a smile on his lips. In spite of his weakness the doctor's words had sunk into his heart, and filled him with inexpressible relief; and as all happiness tends to induce sleep in those who are ill, he had closed his eyes, and fallen asleep peacefully.

His sister sat at the foot of his bed, as still as himself; and, with her face buried in her hands, she poured out her heart in prayer to God. How light appeared to her at that moment all the struggles of a life of poverty! She believed that she could secure to her brother the three months' rest and relaxation, which the doctor had ordered, out of her own small fortune, and to secure these three months she was ready to work all her life long if necessary. The thought never for a moment entered her mind that the cost ought

to be shared equally by them all; still less that Pierre's little capital might fairly have been taken to defray expenses to which their slender income was not equal. Elizabeth instinctively felt herself responsible for the well-being of all; and as a matter of course took upon herself the whole burden of their support. She did not even know that she was making any sacrifice, for to be self-devoted was as natural to her as to breathe.

When Marc appeared at dinner-time, bringing René Surbach with him, he was astonished at the change in Elizabeth's appearance.

'You don't look like the same person that we saw in the morning,' he exclaimed.

'Ah, that is because I have seen the doctor—*your* doctor,' she said, turning towards René; and with a voice that trembled a little she told him all that he had said.

'And in the midst of all this you have been preparing the dinner, I see,' said Marc, in a tone of tender reproach.

'It would never do to let you die of hunger,' said Elizabeth, laughing, as she finished laying the cloth. 'Madame Lupin' (the good nurse) 'can make nothing but broth!'

Henri, springing forward, took the plates out of her hands.

'This is my business,' he said ; and she was obliged to let them force her into a chair.

'That is all very well,' she said, laughing, 'but you will never make a fine lady of me.'

'No,' thought René, 'you are only a noble woman.'

Later in the evening he ventured on a further exercise of authority. Elizabeth was told that she must go to bed that night and leave Pierre to him.

'Do you think I came here that I might sleep in a bed ?' asked M. Surbach, solemnly.

'I do not know why you came,' she replied in a low voice.

'You do not know ?' repeated René. 'Well, I will tell you some day.'

And he installed himself in the large arm-chair beside Pierre's bed.

Never was there a more careful nurse, or a more docile patient.

When he was well and strong Pierre, although admiring René, had always resisted his influence, but now that he was ill he yielded himself to it like the rest of the family. When he looked up and saw the calm figure of the young ironmaster, with his watchful eyes

and thoughtful face sitting beside him, he turned round with a sigh of satisfaction, and, in obedience to a sign from René, went to sleep again.

One night Marc tried to sit up instead of M. Surbach, ‘who must be quite worn out,’ Elizabeth said, not measuring the strength of others by her own; but the attempt did not succeed. As long as Marc kept awake Pierre wanted to talk, and when Pierre wanted something to drink Marc was asleep. So René took possession of his arm-chair again.

‘You have no other alternative,’ he said to Elizabeth, laughing, when she protested; ‘you have no other alternative,’ he repeated, ‘for your plan is inadmissible.’

Henri looked surprised; he was not accustomed to hear his sister spoken to in such a tone of authority.

But M. Surbach was not yet satisfied: all his nights were passed in the sick-room, but during the day Elizabeth still held sole possession. René had, or affected to have, business to attend to, and did not burden them with his presence in the daytime. It was therefore with some surprise that after a fortnight of this kind of life, in which they were together and yet apart, Elizabeth one morning saw M. Surbach enter Pierre’s room. He went up to the invalid, who was daily gaining health, strength, and spirits, and

whose natural calmness contributed greatly to his recovery. ‘You will be able to travel in a fortnight,’ he said, ‘and then you must go to Montreux.’

They had decided that he should go to a sheltered spot on the lake of Geneva. The days were shortening, for it was the beginning of October, and it was desirable now to make arrangements for the journey.

‘A fine traveller I shall make,’ said Pierre, laughing. ‘If I can eat my soup it will be as much as I can manage. I have forgotten the names of all the mountains! Never mind; Elizabeth will settle everything.’

Elizabeth secretly dreaded the journey more than he did. She rose to leave the room, thinking that M. Surbach might wish to be alone with her brother; but he followed her into the sitting-room.

‘You are anxious about this journey?’ he said abruptly.

It seemed so foolish, and yet she could not deny the fact that she was afraid.

‘I shall have got over my fears, I hope, when the time for starting comes.’

‘Elizabeth!’ said René, with indescribable tenderness, ‘will you allow me to go with you?’

She was too much startled to answer at once.

‘Will you give me the right to be with you always?’

he continued,—‘the right to help you to make Pierre well, to make Marc work, to educate Henri? Will you be my wife?’

And then, seeing that she blushed: ‘I have loved you ever since the day that I saw you first—that day when you treated me so badly,’ he added with a touch of bitterness.

Elizabeth was still silent. He could not see her eyes, for she had dropped them. But suddenly she looked up in the face of the man who had asked from her the greatest gift that one creature can bestow upon another. ‘I never knew that I loved you,’ she said simply.

‘And I never knew that it was possible to be so happy,’ answered M. Surbach.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

OR three hours they sat together talking. Marc had come in; Henri had twice opened the door of the room, and Pierre had more than once called his nurse; but after each interruption the conversation was continued, René giving a history of his whole life with an eloquence that astonished himself.

‘Now,’ he said, rising, ‘while you go back to Pierre, I must write to my mother and tell her my good news.’

‘Have you never yet spoken of this to your mother?’ she asked.

‘Before I had spoken to you?’ he rejoined in a tone of reproach.

Elizabeth shook her head.

‘My uncle will not be pleased,’ she said in a low voice; ‘he did not like my father.’

It was René’s turn now to look grave. Elizabeth’s

words had more truth in them than she supposed. Good and kind as he was, M. Delahais had never forgiven the man who had caused the estrangement between him and his sister, who had failed to make her happy, and who had ended by allowing her children to be ruined. Madame Delahais, too, was in everything the echo of her husband.

'Instead of writing I will go and tell them,' he said, after a moment's reflection.

'And when you are gone I shall have time to look after Pierre,' said Elizabeth, laughing.

'I will soon come back and help you!'

Elizabeth left him without further answer, for she heard Pierre's voice calling to her.

René, always quick to carry his resolutions into practice, started that night for the Forge. While he was being swiftly borne along by the train, Elizabeth, in the dim light of a shaded lamp, sat beside Pierre's bed, thinking, praying, resolving how to act. René knew very little as yet of the strength of will of the woman he loved.

M. Delahais had just come downstairs, and was about to unfasten the letter-bag, when the study door opened, and René made his appearance.

'Ah, here you are, my boy!' cried the old man in a joyful voice. 'That is right! Now we shall get into order again. But why did you not write? How did you come here from the station? You certainly have not spoilt us with too many letters; we could not think what had become of you. How is my nephew Pierre? and have you brought Marc back?'

'Pierre is better, but I have not brought Marc back,' said René, who stood unmoved under this running fire of questions. 'I sat up with Pierre every night, and my days were always occupied with business matters.' Then, going up to his stepfather, he added in a low voice: 'I have contracted new ties since I saw you. Yesterday I concluded the most important business of my life. I asked Mademoiselle de Bauville to become my wife.'

'And she has refused you?' exclaimed M. Delahais, starting to his feet. 'Is that why you are here? Just like her father's pride! So much the better; I say, so much the better! A girl without a farthing, and the daughter of De Bauville! What an escape! I do not know what your mother and I should have done if she

{ "Yes."²

she has said "yes," rejoined René a little

M. Delahais sat down again, with a groan. He had had plenty of experience of his stepson's decision of character, as well as of the wisdom and prudence of his conduct, and he was equally well acquainted with something in him that he called obstinacy, so he felt that he had better be cautious.

'Who is she like?' he enquired. 'My sister? No, impossible! My poor Marie would never have had the strength—' But here he stopped, for he found he was drifting into praise of Elizabeth's conduct, which was more than he intended. 'She is just like her father, working at her figures all day long, and leaving her brothers to go on as they can; one gets into debt and I have to pay; the other falls ill and you have to go and nurse him; she sleeps at night while you sit up and watch. And in the day, God knows how the house-keeping goes on! What are you laughing at?' and he made an angry gesture as he looked at the young man, who was still standing before him. René opened his pocket-book and took from it a five-hundred franc note, which he handed to M. Delahais.

'I am responsible for my brothers-in-law, whether ill or in debt,' said he, in reply to a sign of refusal from the old man. Then, resuming the conversation as if he had dismissed the matter from his mind, he continued,

'I was smiling at the thought of what you would say if you saw Mademoiselle de Bauville's little establishment just now, without even a servant, and with an invalid who must be watched night and day. Father, you know me ; and I ask you to honour Elizabeth for my sake ; I will answer for it that when you know her you will love her for her own sake.'

M. Delahais was touched. His step-son's manner as he returned him the money he had paid for Marc had both irritated and pained him ; but René's tone, almost of entreaty, as he reminded him of the confidence he had always placed in him, quite subdued him.

'I never saw you in love before,' said he, rising and stretching out his hand to the young man. 'You fully deserve all the confidence I ever placed in you, and it would certainly be strange if I quarrel with you because you want to marry my niece—my poor sister's daughter ! Come, let us go to your mother ; she has an idea in her mind that she wants to talk over with you.'

Madame Delahais at no time had many ideas in her mind, but she held by those she had with a tenacity proportioned to their rarity.

For several months past she had been very happy in the construction of a matrimonial scheme of which her son was the subject.

M. Lucy, a wealthy proprietor in the neighbourhood, a widower, and too old to think of marrying again, had lately brought his only daughter home from school. ‘She might be taken for his granddaughter,’ Madame Delahais said. Mademoiselle Lucy was small, fair, and girlish-looking, and she liked the same occupations as Madame Delahais, who was really fond of the girl and not the least afraid of her, and was quite sure that M. Lucy would gladly give his daughter to René Surbach, who was everywhere held in such high esteem. But now this beautiful scheme was suddenly blown into the air by a foolish fancy of René ! All poor Monsieur de Bauville’s wrongdoings were revived and laid at Elizabeth’s door, and the old lady’s lamentations over Elizabeth’s position, past and present, were mingled with regrets about Mademoiselle Lucy, which were quite incomprehensible to her son, who had never taken the slightest notice of the girl.

At length M. Delahais succeeded by signs and looks in silencing his wife, and then René kissed her, which drew from her a few words of reluctant acquiescence.

‘Well, if you are pleased, I am sure I ought to be !’ she said rather ungraciously.

René allowed her no time to add more, but rejoined

with immovable composure, 'I am quite sure you will like her.'

Madame Delahais was easily brought round. René was her only child, and hardly ever did wrong.

'You always knew your own mind,' said she, in her turn kissing him. 'When you were a child and asked for a pink bon-bon, you were angry if I gave you a white one, even though it was of the same kind, and I had always in the end to give you the one you wanted.'

'There would be no choice this time,' said René, laughing; 'Mademoiselle de Bauville has not her equal, either in pink or white.'

He was greatly relieved. He loved his mother too dearly, and had too much cause for gratitude to M. Delahais, not to desire their cordial consent to his marriage. 'In less than three months they will not be able to do without her,' thought he.

Great was the consternation of the parents when they learned that M. Surbach intended to go away again immediately. M. Delahais had put on his cap and slippers, and was installed in his arm-chair beside the fire, like a man delivered from the weight of a heavy burden. 'M. Surbach has returned,' he said to the foreman who came to him for orders.

René pleaded that he had left Elizabeth a few hours after their first conversation.

'Then you cannot tell me yet when you will be married?' said Madame Delahais, whose imagination had already gone off to wedding preparations.

'It will be as soon as I can,' said René, laughing.

'And her brothers? What will become of them when you come here?'

M. Surbach no longer laughed, as he replied, 'Wherever Elizabeth has a home her brothers will have one also.'

'You have promised that?' asked M. Delahais, a little uneasily.

His stepson drew himself up.

'I was not asked to promise it,' said he. 'If you had seen Elizabeth with her brothers you would never dream of separating them. I am going to the works; will you come with me?'

But M. Delahais leaned back in his comfortable chair, as he replied, 'No, no; I shall have plenty of time to go when you are not here. I shall enjoy myself while I can; it will not be for long.'

And the two old people, surprised and defeated though they had been, began to recover their equanimity and cheerfulness as they arranged to give René and his

wife, and as many of her brothers as they wished to have with them, the pretty little house that M. Delahais had just built at the entrance of the wood.

'Though I had always thought it would be for Mademoiselle Lucy!' Madame Delahais said. 'Well! well! and now it is for Mademoiselle de Bauville!'

'René has certainly the right to choose for himself,' replied her husband.

And then they turned to the great question of furnishing, and article by article it was discussed. Nothing softens disappointment so much as the desire to give pleasure to others.

It was only forty-eight hours since René had left Paris —only forty-eight hours since the veil had been suddenly removed from Elizabeth's eyes, and since she knew that M. Surbach was indispensable to her happiness.

She had not yet told her brothers. Marc, indeed, might have had his suspicions, but René's sudden departure made him rather doubtful.

'She is quite capable of refusing him,' he thought with anger, but he did not dare to ask if she had done so. And Elizabeth, on her part, did not say a word to let them know that M. Surbach was coming back.

René returned in three days, 'before any one expected

him,' said Elizabeth, who, however, had been looking for him ever since he went away.

The good news he brought were soon reflected on the grave face which he had found leaning against the window of the little parlour.

'There is no need now for any delay,' said René, as he finished his recital, and took the hands of his *fiancée* between his own. 'Pierre will soon be well, and we will go to Switzerland for our wedding journey.'

'René,' said Elizabeth, 'I cannot marry till my task is accomplished—till my brothers have no more need of me—till their prospects are settled.'

'Even Henri's?'

M. Surbach pretended to take her reply as a joke, but at the same time his mind was not quite easy. Elizabeth certainly was not joking.

'Henri? I do not know; he is very young. We could perhaps bring him up ourselves at the Forge. But I will not leave Marc and Pierre till the one has entered St. Cyr and the other the Polytechnique—if God should grant us this blessing,' she added, in a low tone.

'And how long will be required for all that?' asked René, rising and showing signs of ill-suppressed anger.

The two proud reserved characters, the two strong natures, seemed about to engage in open war.

Elizabeth, resolute though she was, cast a beseeching look on her lover. ‘As long as it pleases God,’ said she gently.

René was silent; the words that came to his lips were as unworthy of himself as of Elizabeth. He was conscious of this, and mastered his anger by a violent effort.

‘And what am I to do?’ asked he at length.

‘We will wait and hope. Hitherto I have waited without hope.’

These few words revealed to René the extreme friendlessness of the orphans, and the duty which God had imposed on Elizabeth—too clearly one which it was incumbent on her to fulfil to the end. Poor René began to walk heavily up and down the room.

‘Pierre is asleep.’ A light hand was placed on his arm. He stopped, and without speaking sat down, with his head buried in his hands.

‘It is my duty, René: you would not wish that my first act on entering our new life should be the neglect of a duty. They have no one but me !’

‘And me,’ said M. Surbach shortly.

'And you. You will help me to do my duty.'

René started to his feet, exclaiming, 'Always this duty! What duty are you talking of? Why do they not all come to the Forge? My father means to give us the house at the entrance of the wood. Poor little house! My mother is already furnishing it in imagination.'

Elizabeth saw that her point was gained. René still fought against a painful conviction, but he yielded at last.

'The boys give me too much to do,' said she, smiling presently. 'It is impossible to perform two duties at once, and my duty to them comes before everything else. By-and-by —'

Elizabeth had conquered. M. Surbach opposed her no more. Her inflexible resolution made him fully aware of the rigid principles of right which had always governed her conduct; he understood completely all the reasons which bound the sister so closely to her brothers. There was Pierre, scarcely convalescent, probably needing the most assiduous care for months, and there could be no doubt that Marc required Elizabeth, and that it would be her firm and clear instruction that would alone enable him to pass his examination. René admired the power that duty possessed over Made-

moiselle de Bauville—but he was a man, and in love. His affection, like the natural egotism of his heart, was in revolt against the sacrifice.

‘The truth is she does not love me,’ said he in the evening, when he went to his room at the hotel, where there was nothing to prevent him walking up and down as noisily as he liked.

Fortunately, however, René was a religious man, and, when he knelt down to pray, his anger passed away. He examined his own motives and Elizabeth’s conduct before God, and he learned to know himself better than he had hitherto done.

‘I am a selfish creature,’ he said, ‘and if she does not love me it is my own fault.’ In the depths of his heart he knew he had done Elizabeth injustice in doubting her love because her sense of duty was so strong. He bowed his head before the will of God, whose hand he recognised in Mademoiselle de Bauville’s resolution.

‘I should have been too happy,’ he thought, with a sigh. ‘I must wait.’ And he no longer refused to converse on the subject, as he had done the day before, to Elizabeth’s great vexation. She had begged him not to speak to her brothers of the delay her care for them was making in her marriage.

'It is not necessary for them to know to what extent I belong to them,' said she.

'You belong to me; I lend you to your brothers,' replied René.

He was right. Elizabeth felt it, and with a look asked his pardon.

The victory that M. Surbach had gained over himself was complete; but he smiled as he listened to Elizabeth's plans, which his experience of life enabled him to modify and improve, and at every turn Elizabeth found her difficulties smoothed before her. She was firm in her determination to accept pecuniary aid from no one till the day of her marriage.

'We will do with what we have of our own, as we have always done,' she insisted, with a little hauteur.

'Very well; I have no objection,' said M. Surbach; 'only the railway tickets and the cottage by the lake will swallow up the interest of your little fortune.'

Elizabeth coloured. 'The fortune is already broken into.'

'Not so much, however, but what it will last to the end of this period of waiting, which you will make as short as possible, will you not?'

'I promise you,' replied Elizabeth, and her lover was satisfied with this assurance; and with the conviction that she would one day love him as he loved her. He knew little of the deep tenderness in Elizabeth's heart—she dared not even avow it to herself.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FINISHED WORK.

IERRE and Elizabeth had been established for two months at Montreux. Two little rooms of exquisite cleanliness had been secured for them in a boarding-house by René Surbach, who in consenting to delay his happiness had not consented to give up taking care of Elizabeth.

‘I cannot trust you,’ he wrote to her from the Forge, where he was now living. ‘I understand from Marc that your system of economy consisted in going without everything, and that is why I do myself the pleasure of watching over your arrangements, having some suspicion that you might be trying your plan on my friend Pierre now that you have got him all to yourself. As we have succeeded in underletting the dear little rooms in the Rue St. Jacques before they are given up entirely, you have not the expense of the rent of two lodgings, and you may with an easy mind give yourself up to

the contemplation of the lake and to the conquest of Pierre.'

Elizabeth smiled as she read this letter. She had already conquered, or at least was on the high road to conquer, the somewhat frigid heart of the only brother whose affection she had hitherto been not quite sure of. Pierre had always esteemed Elizabeth above all women, as he pompously expressed it. He appreciated better than Marc or Henri did the sacrifices she had made on their account, for the very reason that he would have been incapable of making such himself. But he did not love his sister, because he really loved no one but himself. Illness and weakness had taught him his dependence on others, or rather on one other, for he was always quite decided in desiring the presence and attendance of Elizabeth only. So long as they were in Paris, she understood without speaking of it that he accepted the services of Marc or René simply from consideration for her.

At Montreux he was perfectly happy; not that he was keenly alive to the wonderful beauties that Nature unfolded before him there, and with which Elizabeth was enchanted to the length of losing whole hours in contemplating them; but he felt his strength increasing day by day. He took longer walks every week, and was

daily conscious of some return of memory, some evidence of recovered intellectual power. He rambled over the mountains when the cold was not too great, or rowed on the lake with keen enjoyment. Sometimes he would take Elizabeth with him on these expeditions, and when he left her at home he would return so bright and invigorated, and would talk so gaily, that his sister thanked God in her heart.

'You are always working,' said Pierre one evening when he saw the old mathematical books carefully ranged on a shelf beside a German dictionary and grammar.

Elizabeth had no natural taste for languages, but René was familiar with English, German, Latin, and Spanish, and she was determined to teach herself something of what he knew, and with her usual courage had already attacked German, saying to herself, 'I know English, and I will learn the rest by-and-by.'

It was over the intricacies of the German grammar that she was knitting her brows now, as she used to do at La Treille over the Algebra.

'I turn to mathematics for relaxation,' she confided to Pierre when she was giving him a humorous account of her struggles with the odious German.

Pierre laughed. 'What a queer relaxation! If you

are really in want of refreshment—not a very likely thing, one would say, in sight of these snow mountains—what would you think of our beginning to do some work together? The doctor said in three months: they are almost gone now, and I have been looking into my books, and I find I remember nearly all I used to know—little enough, truly, in comparison with what I have to learn,' added he with a sigh.

Elizabeth looked at her brother with a malicious little smile on her lips. Since she had been happy in René Surbach's affection she had grown much more lively, and her brothers were often amused to hear her laugh with the *abandon* of a child. She did not reply, and Pierre looked at her in some surprise. His keen, cold look soon grew less confident, and he lowered his eyes.

'You are thinking that I used to say I would never let a woman help me in my work?' said Pierre, rather humbly.

Elizabeth gave a little kind, though triumphant, nod of assent.

'You are quite right,' continued Pierre, 'and it is not only because I have been ill—almost an idiot—that I say so. Even at the time of my foolish boasting I had a feeling that I should perhaps have to come to

you for help—to you, the only one of us who has inherited any portion of our father's talent.'

This first step in the path of humility, forced by the truth on Pierre's proud nature, touched Elizabeth's heart to the core, and she rose and kissed him. Such outward signs of affection were rare between them. Elizabeth had given everything to her brothers—her fortune, her talents, her life. For their sakes she delayed her own happiness and that of the man she loved; but she was of too reserved a nature to give frequent external marks of tenderness. 'One must learn to trust what may be hidden from our view,' she had once said to René, as if to excuse her apparent coldness.

The evidences of her affection spoke for themselves. Pierre pressed his lips on the hand that was leaning on his shoulder, and the treaty between the two was concluded without another word.

The next day their work began. Elizabeth was careful not to overtax her pupil's returning strength, and Pierre himself, habitually prudent, had been taught by experience the necessity of husbanding his powers. As soon as he found he could not work his figures easily, or that a chain of reasoning began to fatigue him, they closed their books and went to the shores

of the lake, if the weather permitted, or for a drive. Elizabeth seldom worked alone now.

'My German gets on slowly,' she wrote to M. Surbach, 'but my object in coming here is not to learn German. Helping Pierre in his work is a very different thing from grinding my poor Marc.'

Marc was plodding on as well as he could at the Forge; but he felt, and René was also conscious of the fact, that his future brother-in-law's instruction was not of the same value to him as his sister's. René soon discovered with some surprise and a good deal of pride that Elizabeth's acquirements in mathematics were far ahead of his own, and heartily admitted the truth of Marc's simple remark that she taught better than anyone else. 'I shall never get through the preparations for my examination without you,' he wrote continually to his sister.

Pierre had quite recovered; the pure air and fine scenery, the long rest and the simple amusements of the country, had completely re-established his health. He was taller, and he had a budding moustache and whiskers, of which he was not a little proud.

'Marc has a great beard,' wrote René, to whom Elizabeth had communicated Pierre's satisfaction on the subject of his moustache, 'and I really think Henri's

whiskers are beginning to sprout. Time goes on : the house in the wood is waiting, and so am I.'

The house, however, was destined to wait still longer.

Elizabeth's tenant in the Rue St. Jacques was gone, and early in April, after five months of separation, M. de Bauville's children were all once more gathered together in the little parlour where they had lived apparently deserted by the rest of the world. But they were now no longer friendless and alone. René Surbach was to come the next day ; letters from M. and Madame Delahais were on the table ; a large hamper of game was in the kitchen, waiting the attention of the mistress of the little establishment. Marc and Henri chatted about their friends at the Forge and at the neighbouring houses. Mademoiselle Lucy's name recurred pretty frequently in Marc's recitals, and Elizabeth privately resolved to question René about her.

'We did not make so many acquaintances at Montreux,' said Pierre, laughing ; 'but that was because I had Elizabeth with me.'

'And Elizabeth is a bear, who is not by nature fond of her kind,' added Elizabeth, smiling.

'You will be obliged to become sociable at the

Forge,' said Henri, embracing his sister for the tenth time. 'My aunt is always giving dinner-parties.'

Elizabeth pretended to shudder.

A week after this they were all at work in good earnest. René's visit came and went like a flash of lightning, and left Elizabeth serenely happy.

'Believe me, you are the greatest comfort and support to me possible, though you are absent,' she wrote to M. Surbach. 'When you are here—' But she did not dare to dwell on this subject, or René would have been in Paris again as fast as steam could bring him. It was the sense of his own and of Elizabeth's duty which alone kept him at the Forge.

Marc worked as he had never worked before—at least, in Elizabeth's experience. He had acquired the habit of assiduous application in a house entirely devoted to business, and managed by the industrious and orderly René.

Elizabeth was equally delighted and surprised when she found him attentive to her instruction, and saw no yawning or wandering looks. Marc was not endowed with remarkable powers, but he possessed enough intelligence to suffice for the task he had undertaken.

'We are pretty sure of success, if he does not get nervous before the day,' wrote Elizabeth; 'but my

hopes of triumph are founded on Pierre's examination. It is a real pleasure to work with and for him.'

But the time came for this pleasure to end. When René arrived in Paris for the examination-day he was painfully struck by Elizabeth's worn appearance, her thinness, and the extreme pallor of her complexion.

'As soon as they are entered at St. Cyr and the Polytechnique you will fall ill,' said her lover, in a tone of reproach.

Elizabeth laughed, as she confessed to being a little tired.

The housekeeping, the needlework, and the labour of being tutor to three boys during the pressure of a double examination, had altogether overtaxed her strength. René was very angry when he found she had no servant.

'Only a woman who comes to help in the morning,' Henri explained; 'and as she takes no pains, she has been changed twice, and that annoys Elizabeth, and it ends in her doing all the work herself.'

'That is why she never answered my questions,' said René; and he wrote the same evening to his mother, asking her to send a servant from Champagne.

'You can train her for the house in the wood,' said he to Elizabeth, when she scolded him for having

acted without consulting her. This was an effectual means of stopping the mouth of Mademoiselle de Bauville, who always thought of happiness to come as a dream, on which she did not dare to count.

The examinations had been over for a week, but the result of them had not yet been declared. Elizabeth was one afternoon sitting near the window, trying to calm her impatience by the monotonous movement of her needle. She was standing up to use the fast-declining daylight to finish mending the linen that had accumulated in her basket during her long weeks of head-work. She often looked down in the street, for she was expecting some one. Suddenly she saw René coming rapidly along without raising his eyes, as he was in the habit of doing, to the upper story. He entered the house, and came up stairs very quickly. Elizabeth opened the door to him as he put his hand on the bell.

'Passed!' he exclaimed.

'Both of them?'

'Both; but we do not yet know in what rank.'

René closed the door. Without the support of his arm Elizabeth could not have reached her chair in the parlour, and her voice trembled when she told her brothers, who were quietly reading, the good news

brought by Monsieur Surbach. He had remained silent till she could speak, leaving to her the pleasure of communicating their success to the boys.

'We owe it all to you!' exclaimed Marc. 'I especially,' added he immediately, with that loving tact which made him peculiarly dear to all those about him. Pierre's eyes said the same.

God had helped Elizabeth to accomplish to the end the work that had been imposed on her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WEDDING. . .



LIZABETH'S duty to her brothers was finished, and she frankly admitted that it was now M. Surbach's turn.

'As soon as Marc and Pierre have entered college,' said she.

'Before they have entered,' persisted René. 'Would you not like to have them at your marriage?' And then Elizabeth yielded.

A week before the end of the vacation, a year from the day that René had come from the Forge to Paris as M. Delahais' representative, when her brothers were about to begin their new life, Elizabeth publicly pronounced the solemn vow which she had already made in her heart when she said to René, 'I did not know I loved you.'

'I never knew before that Elizabeth was beautiful,' said Marc to Pierre, as he saw her in church, composed and grave under her long veil.

'It is the beauty of her mind which shines in her face,' sententiously remarked the Polytechnician, as if laying down a mathematical axiom.

'At last I am sure of you,' said René, in a low voice, as he led his wife triumphantly out of the vestry.

'Have you not been sure of me for six months past?' said Elizabeth. 'I have been sure of you.'

The marriage was a very quiet one. M. Delahais had gout, and could not come to Paris, and Madame Delahais remained with him. René left them both absorbed in the preparations for the home-coming of the newly-married people, which was to take place the day after the boys had entered college.

'And what will you do meanwhile?' Madame Delahais had asked.

'We will all live together in the rooms in the Rue St. Jacques, with Claudine for our servant,' replied René.

And when his mother looked amazed, M. Surbach said with a smile:

'Before my wife comes to share my life here for ever, I wish for a few days to share that which she has so bravely led for four years.'

Elizabeth would have been amused if she had known

how eagerly René looked forward to sharing her old life for this short period.

But things were somewhat changed in the little *ménage* in the fifth story; they did not count the potatoes and the candles now. M. Surbach had declared that he would not take a penny with his wife. ‘Moderation in all things is necessary,’ he said, laughing. ‘I have found a treasure, and I want nothing more.’

The remainder of Elizabeth’s little fortune had been taken to buy her modest trousseau, to replenish the boys’ wardrobes, and to place a headstone on Marianne’s grave. ‘There is still something left,’ said she to René, when all these acquisitions were paid for.

‘Place it to Henri’s account,’ said M. Surbach.

The boy had gravely declared that he would pay for his board in Elizabeth’s family. The incomes of the other boys sufficed for their support.

‘Are you quite sure that you have not forgotten your Latin?’ asked Elizabeth, when René spoke of the arrangements for Henri’s education. ‘I found long ago that I could not help him with his lessons.’

‘How very insulting you are!’ said M. Surbach, laughing. ‘I have been working at classics ever since

last October. When you promised me to come at some time to the Forge, I determined that Henri should accompany you.'

'For more than a year,' said Elizabeth, pressing her husband's hand, 'you have lightened all my cares; may God enable me to lighten yours.'

René made no answer, but resolved in his heart that no burden should ever again oppress Elizabeth, whose path in life had hitherto been so hard and rough. Henceforward he alone would bear the weight of their troubles.

But it was not in the nature of things that he could thus protect Elizabeth, who was one of those whom God has made for days of sorrow as well as for days of joy; she could not and would not have accepted a life of quietness and ease while her husband was toiling beside her.

She was happy—more happy than she had ever dared to dream of being. René, who longed to see her peaceful and glad, did not exact idleness from her, and they had already planned together great schemes for improving the condition of their work-people at the Forge and their families, but she gently resisted her husband's tendency to spare her all pain and trouble. 'You show want of confidence in God,' said she.

'Thorns do not come in our paths unless He sends them.' René coloured, feeling his wife was right.

It was a week since Elizabeth had changed her name ; since which event her brothers had taken every opportunity of calling her 'Madame.' The young folks had left the Rue St. Jacques and gone to their respective 'barracks,' as they termed them. The packing had begun in the little rooms. Elizabeth wished to take certain articles of furniture to the Forge, and regretted being obliged to sell anything.

'You say your mother has completely furnished the house in the wood?' she asked for at least the tenth time of René, who was busy seeing the vans loaded with presses, beds, and the old piano to which Elizabeth was attached from habit and association.

'The house in the wood is ready for you ; my mother has spent on it the value of the diamonds you would not accept.'

'What could I do with diamonds? You have often reproached me for keeping my rings,' replied Elizabeth, smiling.

M. Surbach arrested his wife's hand. Through all the trials of her past life, at times when poverty came very close to her, Elizabeth had never parted with any of the valuable rings which her mother had worn, and

which her father had put on her own fingers after his wife's death.

'I only told you that you did not possess any commercial instinct,' said René, as he kissed the hand he had taken; 'and I maintain that they are unproductive capital.'

'And would what you wished to give me have brought much interest?' enquired Elizabeth.

'It was not I, but my mother. I have my own notions about my marriage present.' And without explaining these ideas he returned to his packing.

The time came for them to go to the Forge, and Elizabeth had heard nothing of the fate of her furniture.

'When it is sold we shall know all about it,' was M. Surbach's frequent reply, and his wife, accustomed to see him exact—even minute—in all business matters, was not a little surprised at the confidence he seemed to repose in the auctioneer's functionaries.

'I have to go on a little journey,' said M. Surbach one morning; 'will you come with me?'

'Certainly;' and the grave Elizabeth, little accustomed to unexpected amusements, and a good deal wearied of having nothing to do, flushed with pleasure at the thought of this expedition to be taken in the company of

her husband, whom she loved more and more every day.
‘Where are we going? When are we to start?’

‘We are going to the other side of the Department, and we must set out to-morrow. Take a portmanteau, for we shall probably be absent about a week,’ was René’s reply.

‘And Henri?’

‘Henri will manage for himself.’ And René said no more.

Unquestioning submission was rather difficult to Elizabeth; but she had not waited till now to learn to trust her husband, so she joyfully set about her little preparations.

They travelled for several hours on branch lines of railway, where the trains did not go very fast, and René grew impatient. At length they stopped at a little station, when Elizabeth looked out and exclaimed,

‘It is Lardy!’

‘Yes, it is Lardy,’ said René, with an indifferent air, as he bent forward to open the door.

‘Do we get out here?’

‘Yes.’

René was unusually laconic, and his wife said no more.

They got into a little carriage that was waiting, and without asking for orders the man drove off.

Seated in front, Elizabeth was silently looking at scenery every line of which she recognised. When they turned out of the high road and she saw the clayey soil so familiar to her, it was unmistakable. It was really the road in front of La Treille! ‘Where are we going?’ she asked herself, not liking to question M. Surbach before the driver.

She could not call to mind the existence of any merchant or of any working people in the neighbourhood of her old home with whom René could have business. ‘Doubtless it is all changed,’ said she to herself, ‘and I only am unchanged, for my heart beats at finding myself so near La Treille. Oh if I might but go up the avenue on foot! ’

At that moment M. Surbach stopped the carriage as if he had divined her wish.

‘You will be glad to walk a few steps, I daresay,’ said he.

‘But your appointment?’

‘I am not in any hurry.’

She hardly knew whether joy or sorrow prevailed in her heart. Leaning on her husband’s arm, she advanced in silence up the long avenue, which she had last seen in a whirlwind of snow a few days after her father’s death had left her alone in the world, with the charge of

her orphan brothers. The crackling of the first dry leaves under her feet recalled her father's walks in this same avenue, and the day he had helped Henri to make his great fire. She walked on, seeing nothing but the past ; her heart was full.

When they reached the end of the avenue Elizabeth raised her head. The little house rose before her, modest and smiling. Thomas was there just as he used to be, and at the window of the little drawing-room Henri's face appeared, beaming with delight. Elizabeth turned with a bewildered look to her husband, saying,

'Am I dreaming ?'

'No, dear ; this is your wedding present. La Treille was in the market, and I have bought it. It is settled on you in that marriage contract which you signed without reading.'

Elizabeth heard no more. With a steady step she entered the house, and, neither looking to right nor left, nor stopping at the door of the room at which Henri stood smiling, she put her hand on the lock of her father's study and entered. Within nothing was changed. All the articles of furniture taken away from the Faubourg St. Jacques had been restored to their old places. The faithful care of Thomas had even set a large arm-chair before the writing-table, 'for M. Surbach will write here,' he said.

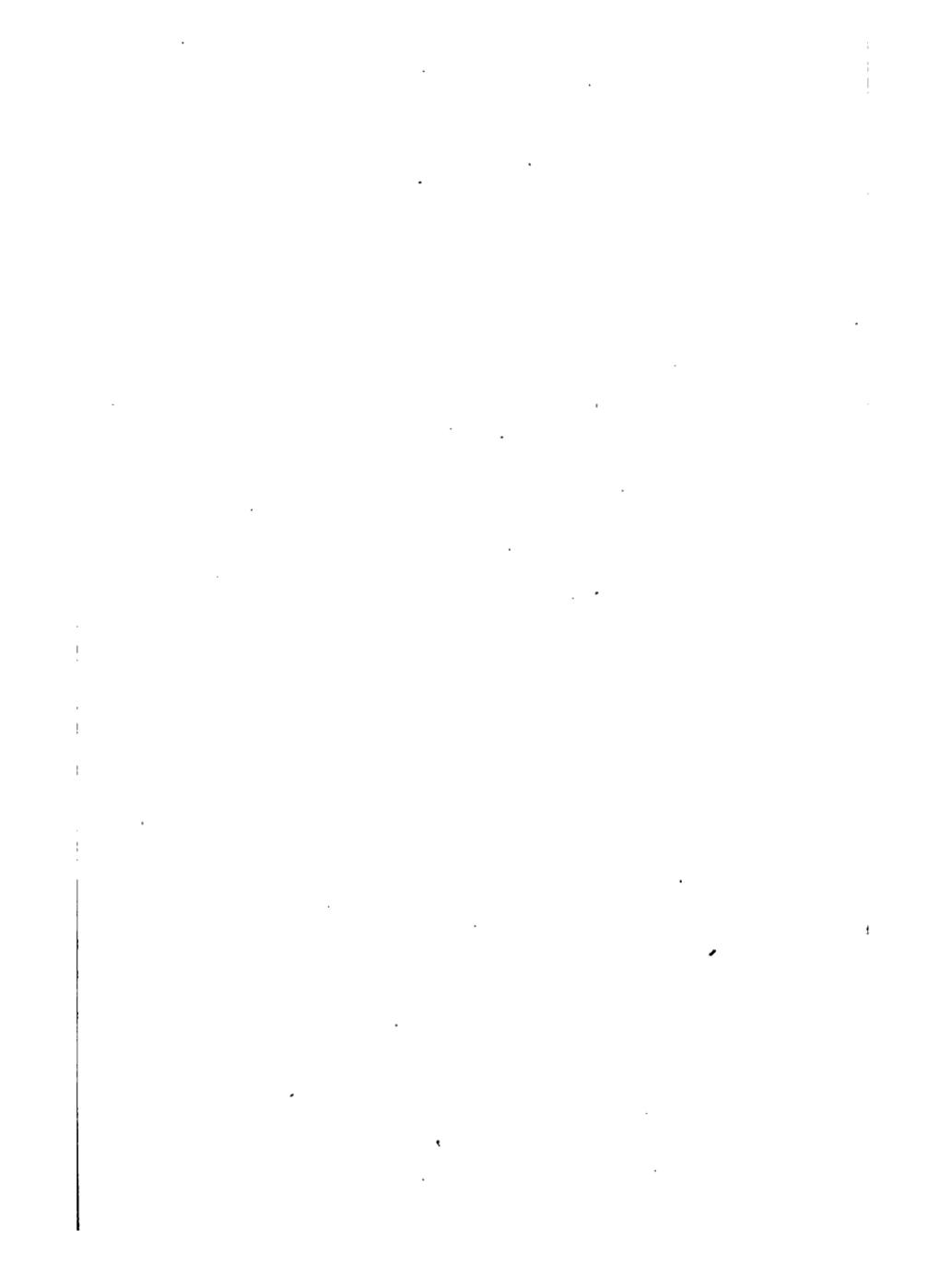
Elizabeth knelt down beside the table and leant her head on the arm of the chair.

'It was here I found him,' she murmured.

For a minute all the painful past came back to her, and she seemed once more to feel the cruel sense of isolation that had overwhelmed her in the first days after her father's death; but presently she raised her eyes and saw her husband bending over her.

'God is very good!' she said; and, rising up, she kissed Henri, who had remained at the door half embarrassed.

'The past and the future meet together here,' said M. Surbach, replying to her look.



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